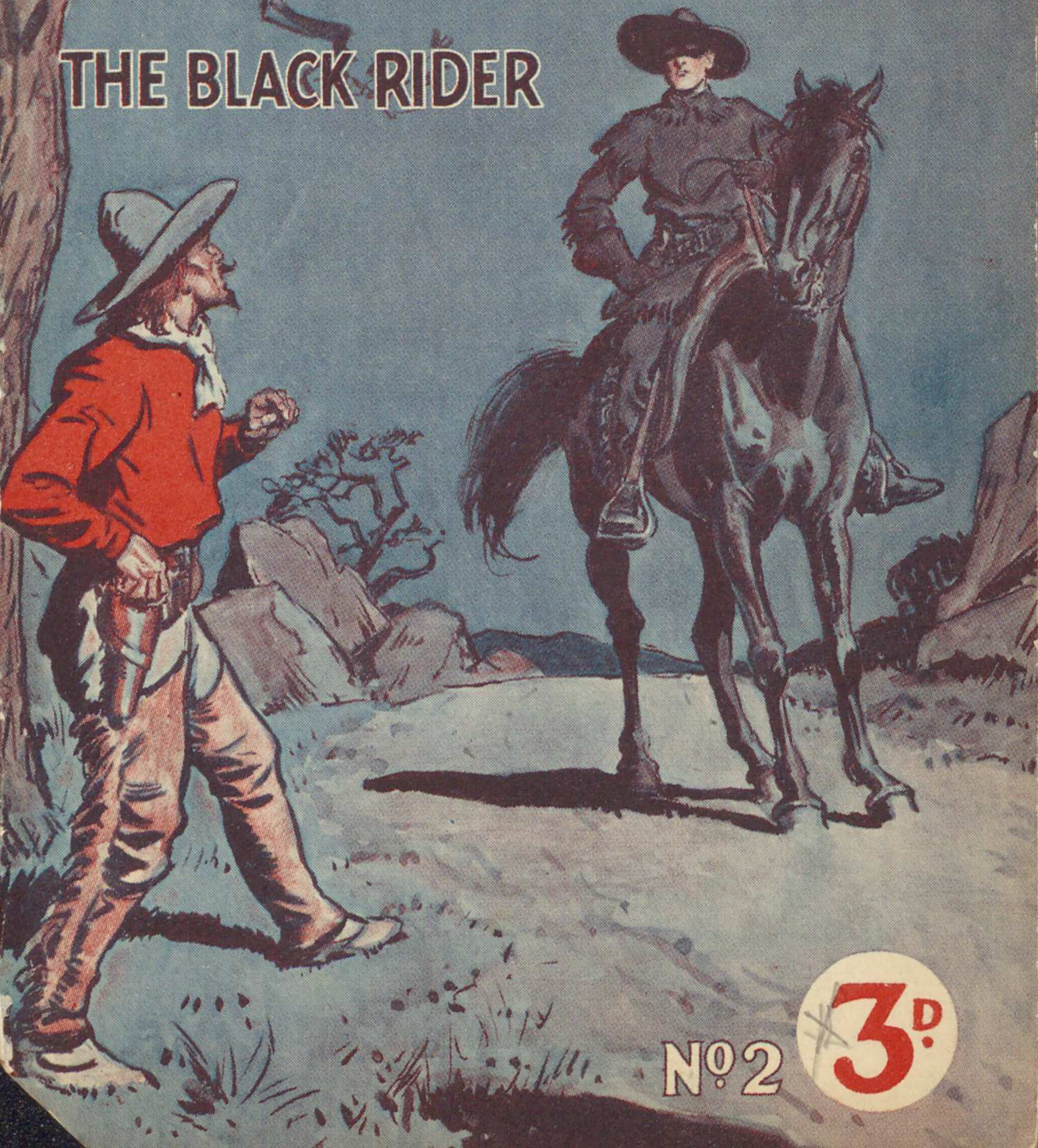


DEADWOOD DICK

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THE BLACK RIDER



Nº 2

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THE BLACK RIDER

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"SOMETHING ABOUT DEADWOOD DICK.—Mr. Edward Harris, or, as he is better known, 'Deadwood Dick,' has literally more lives than a cat. For some time past we have heard little about him, but now his name is whispered in connection with the last stage-coach robbery, near Cheyenne. On Tuesday a watchful band of Deadwood Regulators, led by Dashing Dave, pounced down upon him and a portion of his band in Big Lode Canyon, and a terrible struggle ensued. All of the road-agents were slaughtered without quarter—all except Deadwood Dick. He, on his big black stallion, was seen to ride straight up the mountain-side, where none could follow. Nor did bullets seem to check his progress. So much, again, for the notorious youth, who is making for himself a name, as a daring road-rider, second to none in the world."—*Deadwood Pioneer*, July 13th.

The above paragraph created quite a *furore* of excitement in the Deadwood circles. For perhaps a month past the sensational news of the Black Hills had been rather stagnant. The absence of Indians from the vicinity had lessened the number of reports of murderous attacks, and a quietude among the much-dreaded "gents of the road" had been the means of lulling Deadwood and her sister towns into a drowse of peaceful content and serenity.

Journalism in Deadwood has not reached that acme of perfection attained in our eastern cities; still, some enterprising individual, with the aid of pen, scissors and paste, and a dilapidated hand-press, has succeeded in bringing to light a very creditable sheet, considering everything, whose heading is *The Pioneer*, it being devoted to the mining interest, etc.

The office of the worthy newspaper was upon the second floor of a building directly across from the "Metropolitan" saloon,

and was very scantily furnished, and attended by a very wise-looking young gentleman from the East, who was a reporter, and a combination of the city dandy and crushed actor.

This individual was perched on a high stool behind the office desk, one bright morning a few days subsequent to the issue of the paper containing the above paragraph, engaged in writing an editorial, when the door was unceremoniously opened and a person entered the room. Augustus looked up with a patronizing nod, and beheld a broad-shouldered, bewhiskered miner standing before him—an exceedingly rough-looking customer he was, attired in dirty, mud-splashed corduroy, with a small arsenal of sixes belted about his waist. Little of the face was visible through a thick bush of red beard, but the gleam from the small black eyes was dangerous.

"Howdy do?" saluted Augustus, in a business-like manner, giving an extra flourishing stroke of his pen, and then giving his attention to the visitor. "In what way might I be able to serve you, sir?"

"Humph!" and the miner gave a contemptuous grunt as he glanced about the office. "Reckon this ar' the shebang whar they print the *Pi'neer*, hey?"

"This is the editorial room of that publication, yes," replied Augustus, loftily.

"Tho't so. 'Spect the boss be about, not?"

"I am sorry to say Mr. Wilbur isn't in, sir. Important business called him away to Elizabeth City over an hour ago."

"Waal, I opine et doan't make much difference, atwixt you'n me. Reckon you'll do jes's well as Mister Wilbur; leastwise I'll make you. I've got an egg to break wi' somebody, an' jes's lief it'd be with you as anybody else."

Here the miner stopped and fumbled in his pocket industriously, at last bringing forth a late copy of the *Pioneer*. This he spread carefully upon the desk in front of our Augustus, and with one white, slender

finger, so greatly at contrast with his general appearance, he pointed to the large-type heading of a column: "Something about Deadwood Dick," as per paragraph.

"Now, one o' my errants here, ar' to see the individual who writ them truthful lines uv prosaic."

"I am proud to say I penned that sensational paragraph," announced Augustus, drawing himself up to his fullest height.

The customer in corduroy stared.

"So you writ it, did yer?" he asked.

"Assuredly I did!"

"Waal, mind that you don't write another like et, if you doan't want ter git knocked inter the middle of day before yisterday. Deadwood Dick do not keer to be made quite so free wi' about these times. Now, about my other errant. I want ye to put a 'vertisement in your *Pi'neer*, w'at'll cover a hull page, an' I want it in big type, too, so everybody can read it right plain. Now, jist listen to w'at's on this bit o' dockymment, so you'll remember it till ye put it inter type."

So saying the rough visitor brought forth another piece of paper from his pocket, and after studying it for a few moments, he read, aloud:

"Deadwood Dick, the Road-Agent, desires to say, through these columns, that he defies Deadwood itself and all its inhabitants; that he is even now within the confines of the Magic City, and will soon show the so-called Deadwood Regulators that for every Road-Agent killed in Big Lode Canyon, the other day, he will guarantee the demise of a Regulator. Let Dashing Dave beware! let all Deadwood beware! for the Prince of the Road is on his muscle!"

"The Public's dutiful servant,

"(Signed) DEADWOOD DICK."

"Now, good-day," said the miner, "an' remember ye'll git a bullet through your skull if that ar' 'vertis'ment doan't come out!"

Augustus bowed, stiffly, and the uncouth visitor took his departure.

The next issue of the *Pioneer* contained the bold warning of Deadwood Dick. To say it caused a sensation would be putting it mild. There was an unprecedented excitement in mining circles; the article was the theme of discussion for a hundred tongues or more: capitalists frowned and hugged closer to their gold; miners kept their weapons handy; Dashing Dave's Regulators kept shady; inside of ten hours after the appearance of the notice in the *Pioneer*, the "solid" men of the Magic City had made up a purse,

and a thousand dollars was the price set for the capture of the notorious Deadwood Dick.

The so-styled Regulators were under the pay of the influential men of Deadwood—a sort of finance body-guard, waging war against road-agents and thieves generally, and striking blows in the defence of justice.

Dashing Dave was a tall, brawny, handsome borderman of three-and-twenty years, who had won a great name as an Indian fighter during the troubles preceding the fatal Custer engagement, and was feared by a large class of the desperate characters who infested the Black Hills.

He, with a half-dozen of his comrades were gathered in the Metropolitan saloon, on the evening after the latest issue of the *Pioneer*, discussing matters in general.

"There seems no doubt left but that Deadwood Dick is really down among us again," said one of the party. Big-eared John by name, and as hardy a border veteran as ever pulled trigger. "He grows bolder every full moon, darn my old pelt if he don't."

"If I mistake not, his race is nearly run," replied Dashing Dave, his eyes constantly roving around as though in search of some one.

"Reckon Justin McKenzie's wife would take it mighty hard if Dick wer' to git put under the sod. He's her brother, you know, and she thinks the world of him."

"I don't care. Duty is duty, and no females shall stand in the way. Have you put a watch on McKenzie's shanty, as I ordered?"

"Yes, but you'll never trap your game in that direction. Mr. Road-Agent Dick is shy'er 'an a fox, and twice as slippery as any eel ye ever see'd, and when ye ketch him napping, jes' consider the millennium clos't to hand."

"Well, wait and see. Keep your eyes and ears about you, and maybe you'll scare up something when you least expect it."

So saying Dashing Dave sauntered off through the densely thronged apartment, followed by many admiring glances.

He presently chanced upon a vacant seat at an empty table, and was not long in making himself the possessor of it, for a chair in a Deadwood saloon after sunset is a scarce piece of furniture.

Not long had he been seated, however, when he was tapped gently upon the shoulder, and turning he beheld a young man standing just behind him.

He was superbly built, and attired in tanned buckskin, but little or nothing of his face could be seen on account of an immense

slouch hat that was drawn down over his eyes.

"Well?" demanded Dave, interrogatively, "what will you have?"

"This chair, if you please!" was the decisive response. "I sat here before you did, and you usurped my place while I was away for a cigar."

"Can't help it, my friend. I found this seat vacant, and I reckon find 'em's keep 'em, 'round this ranch; so go along and find the mate!" advised the Regulator.

"Which I decline to do," replied the stranger, as coolly as if he were an iceberg. "That chair belongs to me, and here's what says so!"

He held a cocked revolver in his right hand, which was as white as a woman's. The glitter of the weapon and the tone of his voice bespoke *business*!

CHAPTER II

THE TWO FUGITIVES

"Sh! don't make a noise. If their attention is attracted we are lost!"

So spoke a young girl, over whose head had passed barely seventeen summers.

The scene was at the bottom of a deep, dark canyon, walled in by the mighty tree-clad mountains.

The girl and a male companion stood secreted in a clump of undergrowth at a point where one smaller gulch or canyon on either side branched off from the main one, making it a sort of natural turnpike.

The girl and her companion, a small, stout negro of tremendous muscular power, were entirely screened from view among the underbrush, while all the time they were enabled to command a straight outlook down the main and transverse canyon, into which the new moon slanted a few yellow rays.

Up the main canyon, coming directly toward the "split" or "divide," was a company of horsemen, perhaps a dozen in all, advancing at a slow trot; and it was to these that the young girl had alluded.

There were twelve of them, all rough, bearded borderers, save two, whose appearance was a trifle less uncouth and grisly. The one was a portly man of perhaps forty years, with a full, florid face, ornamented with "Burnside" whiskers, which were slightly streaked with grey; black eyes, and shaggy eyebrows to match; an aquiline nose, and a complexion of a swarthy brown. His dress was scrupulously neat, and the

diamond pin upon his immaculate shirt front was of the first water.

The other man was older by perhaps ten years;—was poor in flesh, shrivelled and wrinkled. His face was a mirror of his black, evil nature; his eyes constantly emitted gleams of a baleful light; dissipation and debauchery had wrecked his life; avarice and greed for gain mainly kept him alive; he was a repulsive object to gaze upon.

His attire, however, was even superior to that of his companion, being cut in the latest style and of more costly material. Diamonds glittered upon his tie, upon his shirt front, and upon his fingers.

"Aha!" muttered the girl, Leone, as her eyes rested upon him; "if ever I was tempted to commit murder it is now. Jasper Leslie, I could kill you, base, designing wretch that you are, without a bit of compassion."

"Dem's my sentimen's eggsactly!" declared the negro, whose name was Johnson.

As the horsemen came to a halt, the repulsive individual, whom Leone had called Jasper Leslie, gave vent to a horrible curse.

"Here's a pretty go! Where has our game gone, I should like to know?"

"Yes, you may well ask that, Jasper Leslie," sneered he with the "Burnsides." "If you have let the girl escape, you know the consequences. Off comes your head, in less than no time."

"I'll find the girl if I have to raise hell on earth!" declared the old man, with an oath. "She cannot escape me, try though she may."

"I see no prospect of overtaking them to-night," growled one of the men. "Here we ar', nigh six miles from Deadwood, an' hain't see'd hide nor hair on 'em. I propose we camp down yere, an' wait fer daylight."

"Not much!" retorted Leslie, savagely. "Guess they've got fur enuff start now, wi'out givin' 'em any more. We'll all take a stiff drink of 'mountain dew,' to brace up our nerves, and then go on."

A large bottle was accordingly produced from one of the saddle-bags, and passed around, each man helping himself to a liberal allowance.

"Now, which canyon shall we take?" asked Brierly, who had proposed to halt on the spot for the night. "We don't dare to split up, fer fear of road-agents; an' here's three routes the gal may hev took."

"We'll take the main course," decided Leslie.

According to the order, the whole caval-

cade put spurs to their steeds, and dashed away noisily up the main canyon, through the night's dim light.

"Thank Heaven they are gone!" muttered Leone, when they were out of sight beyond a curve in the course. "It was a very narrow escape."

"Dem's my sentimen's eggsactly," responded Johnson, drawing a long sigh of relief.

"But, now that our enemies have ske-daddled, what are we going to do?" asked Leone.

"Jes' w'at I was cogitatin' on, Miss Leone. S'posin' we huff it back to Deadwood."

"No; that would be next to following up our enemies and surrendering ourselves. Without doubt, Curtis Sydnor and my father have posted spies there, who would nab us as soon as we showed our faces. Only one thing remains," continued the maiden, stepping from her concealment. "We must take one of these transverse canyons, and follow it until we can find a secure hiding-place. The left one has a stream of water—let us take that."

"Berry well. I'se no 'jections, providin' it are fur de best. I'll go ahead, an' you can brung up de rear."

So saying the negro threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm, and led the way into the left canyon, Leone following close at his heels.

And thus the twain wandered on.

Johnson had spent the latter years of his life upon the frontier, and was a thoroughly good trailer, his familiarity with mountain and prairie rendering him invaluable as a guide.

He was very keen of hearing and observing, but to-night he was less guarded than usual, and as a result, ere he was scarcely aware of the fact, in rounding an abrupt curve in the canyon, he came face to face with a horseman, who had halted, evidently hearing their approach by the echo of their footsteps.

Leone uttered a startled scream as her eyes rested upon the unexpected rider, and stepped closer to her sable companion as if feeling reassurance, that he was with her. Johnson stopped stock-still and would have raised his repeater, had he not perceived a gleaming pistol in each hand of the stranger covering him.

The horseman was a brawny, powerfully built man and fully armed. His face was covered from nose to shirt-collar with thick black beard, the moustache of which reached across each cheek, the ends hanging down beyond his ears. His eyes were dark and

sinister, and brows shaggy, but what was most remarkable of all, was his forehead, which was low and retreating, and *jet black in colour*! seemingly burnt, the flesh being hard—and crackling—seared, as by flames.

A slouch hat ornamented a shock of black hair upon his head, and a tanned, embroidered suit of buckskin fitted his powerful figure, ending with beaded moccasins and leggings.

The grim rider was the first one to speak, and in a growling, deep voice, asked:

"Well? who be ye an' where ye goin'?"

"That depen's all on sarcumstances," replied Johnson. "My name is Johnsing—Benjamin Brewster Johnsing. Who de debbil d'ye s'pec' you are?"

The horseman uttered a loud, hoarse laugh. "It can't be that ye're long in these parts, or ye'd know well enough. My name is Black Harper!"

"Phew! you don't tell us dat you is dat debbil's imp, hisself, do you? I heerd of Black Harper in Deadwood, and dey said he was a cuss!"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the horseman, his deep voice becoming boisterous; "sed I was a cuss, did they? Haw! haw! haw! Yes, nigger, that's about my calibre. I'm a cuss clean from my socks to the top o' my attic, you bet, and if you don't find me so, why chalk it down that I'm a liar!"

"I don't doubt your word the least bit, Mr. Black Harper, so jest be obligin' enuff to lower de aim ob your revolvers. Seein's we've met, I s'pec' you inten' to do sum-t'inks, eh? Speak up."

"Waal, I shouldn't wonder. I reckon ye don't go up this canyon no funder, not if dis horse knows hisself. Hello! what d'ye call that ar' behind you? A female—a real live kickin' critter of the Eve persuasion. It is, or I am a liar, an' no one ever calls Black Harper a liar but once. Step out hyer so I can git a fair squint at ye."

"Hide behind me," cautioned Johnson. "Don't show yer face for yer life, honey!"

"D'ye hear?" commanded the outlaw, riding closer. "Come out, I say."

But Leone refused, for she knew it boded her no good to let the ruffian feast his eyes upon her.

"You get back, old coon!" ordered Ben, his white eyes rolling threateningly. "I jes' advise you to go along an' mind your business, or dar'll be a corpuss around here fur some one to bury. You hear *me*!"

But Black Harper uttered an oath of contempt, and levelling a revolver at the negro, pulled the trigger!

CHAPTER III

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S HANGING

"Oh! you can't scare me worth a cent," said the Regulator, calmly, as he gazed down the throat of the other's weapon. "I wasn't brought up in the woods to be scared out by an owl, much less an ornery looking pill like you."

"You were evidently brought up where good breeding was a dead letter!" was the sarcastic response. "Come, are you going to vacate? I do not wish to hurt you, but if you don't get out of there before I have time to count thirty, there will be a first-class job for an undertaker, hereabouts."

Dashing Dave stared at the cool stranger in astonishment.

"Who are you?" demanded the Regulator, still refusing to move; trying to divert the other's attention while his hand stole toward his belt. But the watchful eyes of the stranger caught the move, and the hammer of his revolver came back to full cock, with an ominous click.

"No matter who I am," was the stern reply. "I have counted twenty. Ten more, and off goes the summit of your skull, if you don't pucker up!"

Dashing Dave reflected a moment, and then rose from the chair.

"There, curse you, take the chair!" he said, fiercely. "But, mind you, I will have my revenge for this. I don't chaw insults without retrieval!"

"You seem to take 'em in, kind of natural, like!" laughed the victor, taking possession of the chair. "Hunt up another perch, pardner, or sit down on your thumb, an' let's take a beer. That will wash down the burning sensation of your defeat!"

"No! nothing but your blood will wash it down!" hoarsely growled the chief, as he strode away, leaving the stranger laughing quietly to himself.

Later in the evening the same individual was still seated at the table, puffing slowly at a cigar. He seemed wrapt in deep thought, yet it was noticeable that his black eyes were ever roving over the motley assembly, as if in search for some one.

Unobserved, Dashing Dave had worked his way around to a position directly in the rear of his enemy, and in a moment when the stranger least expected it, his hat was snatched from his head, revealing his face to the gaze of all the nearest bystanders, under the full glare of the gaslight.

A cry of astonishment came then.

Dashing Dave reeled back, aghast, a terrible oath peeling from his lips:

"Deadwood Dick!" he cried.

"Deadwood Dick, the road-agent!" seconded the crowd, gathering around breathlessly, knives and pistols drawn in an instant.

The face so suddenly uncovered was strikingly handsome, and any one who had ever once seen Ned Harris, the road-prince, could not doubt that this was indeed the man.

And there he sat quietly, a sarcastic smile breaking out about his lips.

"Gentlemen!" he said, biting off the end of a fresh cigar, "you all seem to see something uncommonly attractive about me. Do you for a moment imagine that I am the notorious road-agent of the Black Hills, whom you call Deadwood Dick?"

"We don't imagine nothing of the kind, my gay young Claude Duval of modern times!" declared Dashing Dave, triumphantly. "You're Deadwood Dick, and everybody knows it by one glance at your face. The features of Ned Harris are too prominent and bold in expression to easily be forgotten."

"Nevertheless," replied the young man, coldly, "you've got hold of the wrong chap this time. I'm not Deadwood Dick, neither do I claim any relationship to that illustrious gentleman. My handle is Hawk—Gerald Hawk, at your service, and I hail from Austin, Texas."

"Haw! haw! haw!" A great shout of derision went up from the crowd.

"That'll do to tell marines!" sneered the Regulator, with a wink at the crowd. "Here's an eye you can't shut up, however. I *know* you're Deadwood Dick, and you're bound to swing, now that we've fairly got you. What say you, my boys?"

"Ay! ay! ay! ay!" assented a chorus of voices. "String him up! Hang him for his crimes!"

"Correct! Let his death be a lesson to all who choose the life of a road-agent. Seize him, and some one get a rope!"

A dozen willing hands grasped the cool road-agent, if road-agent he was, and held him imprisoned in a firm grip, while his wrists were bound behind him. He made no resistance, probably because he realized that it would be useless.

"You have made a serious mistake, gentlemen!" he protested, as a rope was noosed about his neck. "If you suspend me, thinking you are ridding the world of Deadwood Dick, you are committing one of the gravest errors of your lives, for I am not the man—I swear it!"

"You can swear as much as you please, my fine fellow!" taunted Dashing Dave, ordering the arrangement of the noose. "I don't care if you tell a hull bushel of lies, it won't help your case one iota. There, boys, that'll do; now, come along, one and all, for there's music in the air!"

And so saying, the Captain of the Regulators led the way out of the thronged saloon, followed by an escort of a score of his own men with the prisoner; and behind them surged the noisy crowd, eager to witness the execution.

Out into the busy main street of the Magic City they marched, making a weird procession under the light of the midsummer night's moon, the yells and shouts growing louder and more boisterous each moment.

The nearest tree suitable was several hundred yards down the gulch, in front of a neat little cottage, and toward this the would-be executioners hurried their victim.

At last the tree was reached, and a great ring was formed around it by the uncouth and grisly audience. Inside this ring the prisoner was conducted, and positioned beneath the tree's outspreading branches, the free end of his halter being tossed up over a stout limb, and dropping on the other side was seized by half a score of Regulators.

Thus in an instant all was ready for the execution.

"Fellers!" cried Dashing Dave, turning to the vast multitude assembled, "we have here, ripe for suspension, one of the worst desperadoes in the whole Black Hills country, namely—Deadwood Dick. For nearly two years he has held a reign of terror in these regions, and his daring crimes are without equal. All of you know that more than a dozen men in Deadwood have fallen by his hand. Does it then stand to reason that we should give him a formal trial?"

"No! no!" shouted a hundred voices. "String him up without no trial. Yank him up an' let's see what kind of stuff he's made of. Hurrah! one, two, three, now, and give him a boost!"

"Hold! what's the meaning of this?" cried a newcomer, elbowing his way through the crowd and confronting Dashing Dave. "What would you do?"

"None of your business, Justin McKenzie," retorted the Regulator chief, insolently. "Reckon ye can see, without bein' so inquisitive. We've got your estimable brother-in-law, Deadwood Dick, and we're a-goin' to string him up. D'ye understand!"

McKenzie turned with a start and gazed at the prisoner, whom before he had only given a casual glance.

"Great Heaven, Harris, is this you?" he cried, stepping closer, his features working with emotion. "I hoped never to see you in such a fix as this. God grant that Anita may never hear of it!"

"Anita?" echoed the prisoner, his face assuming a puzzled expression. "Who is Anita? Who are you?"

"What! don't you know me, Harris? Is it possible that in the few short months since we separated you have forgotten me, Justin McKenzie? Don't you remember?—I married your sister, Anita?"

The prisoner shook his head, a smile wreathing his lips.

"No. I am positive I never saw you." Then a new light seemed to dawn upon him. "Ah! I see," he added; "you take me for Deadwood Dick, eh?"

"Certainly. You are he—or, in reality, Ned Harris," replied McKenzie.

"No, I am not. My name is Gerald Hawk, and I am from Austin, Texas. These fools have mistaken me for some desperado of your accursed Black Hills country, and it looks probable that I am elected to swing for this other fellow's crimes."

McKenzie looked grave.

"I am afraid that won't work, Harris," he said, pityingly. "You are too well known around these parts to attempt deception. Would to God I had it in my power to help you, but I fear I have not."

"I don't crave help!" replied the prisoner, half-angrily. "I have heard it said that Deadwood Dick is brave, and if I am to die in his name, it will be bravely. I have never done anything bad that I am afraid to face my God, so these gentlemen can go ahead with their murder as soon as it suits them."

Inwardly McKenzie groaned, and he turned to Dashing Dave to plead the case.

"You see how it is," he said, earnestly; "the poor fellow is not in his right mind. Surely, gentlemen, you will not hang a man in his condition."

"We just *will*, though!" growled the Regulator, grimly. "Reckon I'm a cool thousand richer when that devil's feet ar' off 'm *terra firma*. Crazy or no crazy, he's got to swing. Get ready, boys!"

McKenzie sprang to the prisoner's side and flung his arms about his neck.

"Good-bye, Harris, old fellow," he said, huskily, tears raining from his eyes. "I must leave you now, for I cannot stop these men, and would not witness your death-struggles. Have you any word to send to Anita, Ned?"

"None!" replied the prisoner, briefly.

McKenzie then gave him one last brotherly

embrace, and turning, staggered blindly away, the crowd parting to let him pass.

Then, just as the moon seemed the most ghostly bright, and a puff of wind sighed a mournful dirge through the branches of the gallows-tree, Dashing Dave waved his hand to the men at the rope, there was a universal cry of "Heave oh!" and the doomed prisoner was pulled up into mid-air.

His struggles were fortunately of short duration. After a slight writhing and twisting of the limbs, the body straightened downward, and life was pronounced extinct.

"You need not let him down," ordered Dashing Dave, "but fasten the rope, and let him hang there till sunrise. I tell you there's nothing like making sure of a thing."

Accordingly the crowd dispersed, and the ghastly object was left hanging, a fearful example of what justice is in the wild Far West.

The crowd dispersed to the various saloons, to talk over the events of the evening, and drink over the death of the road-agent prince, who had spread such a reign of terror wherever he had gone.

CHAPTER IV

DEADWOOD DICK'S VOW OF VENGEANCE

DASHING DAVE, the Chief of the Regulators, was a man who might be admired at a distance, but come to make his personal acquaintance and study his character, and you found him far from your expectation. He was, to all outward appearances, a thoroughly upright gentleman, yet he was as bad at heart as many of his fellow-men who bore a far worse reputation.

One day as he was lounging in front of the notorious Metropolitan, engaged in inspecting the constant throng of passers-by, a woman, trim of figure and a trifle haughty of carriage, came down the street from the direction of a row of new cottages that had recently been erected and tenanted.

She was clad in deep mourning, and so closely veiled that nothing of her face was visible.

Dashing Dave watched her narrowly from the time he first caught sight of her, until she had hurriedly passed, and vanished down the street.

"I wonder who that trim craft is?" he muttered, puffing away at his pipe meditatively. "I don't recollect of ever seeing her before. Wonder if she holds out in one of them shanties? Confound it, if she comes

back this way, I'm hanged if I don't make a dive for her acquaintance."

True to his word he continued to lounge about the street, watching narrowly for the reappearance of the veiled woman who had so excited his curiosity. Several hours passed, and he was growing impatient at the delay, when once more he caught a glimpse of the trim figure coming from the direction in which she had previously gone. But unfortunately for his designs, she was accompanied by a young man, well-dressed and ordinarily good-looking, whom he perceived at a glance to be Justin McKenzie, the brother-in-law of the dead road-agent.

"Ha! then, perhaps that is his wife?" the Regulator mused, allowing them to pass without interruption. "I hate that McKenzie!" he growled, biting savagely at his nails by way of relieving his feelings. "He is too stuck up with his ideas, entirely. I'd like to give him a dig, and I believe I have found just how to touch him in a tender spot. I'll get up a flirtation with his wife, and that will be genuine torment to him, for he is very jealous."

That evening he procured a handsome bouquet of choice flowers, and sent it to the cottage by a young Indian lad, whom he had taken into his employ. Of course there came no answer; indeed, the evil schemer expected none—not yet.

On the following morning and evening two more choice floral offerings found their way to the McKenzie cottage, and the latter one contained a delicately perfumed note, couched in the following manner:

"DEAR MRS. MCKENZIE,—Charmed not only with your beauty of face and form, but with your purity, goodness, and grace, and well-knowing the shameful falsity of your husband, I take this mode of forming your valuable acquaintance, trusting you will not deem me bold.

"If you will grant me a single interview, it will afford me the greatest pleasure, and I shall be enabled to prove to you, that in clinging to Justin McKenzie for a husband, you are fostering a base, ungrateful wretch.

"Respectfully yours,

"DASHING DAVE."

The chief of the Regulators had scarcely expected a reply, yet he was highly elated at his success when his Indian messenger brought him back the following, written in a neat feminine hand:

"To-night, beneath the tree where my brother was hung, at eight. ANITA."

"Ha! this certainly savours of victory," ejaculated the schemer, triumphantly. "My dart has entered her heart, and now we will see where the fun comes in. Under the tree where her brother was hung. Ugh! what if Deadwood Dick should protrude his haunting visage from one of the branches? Bah! I am getting cowardly. I'll take down a few horns of mountain dew, and hie myself to the trysting-place that I may be in time."

He accordingly entered the Metropolitan, and drank several glasses of liquor at the bar, after which he lit a cigar, looked to his weapons, and quitted the saloon *en route* for the appointed meeting beneath the gallows-tree.

The night was intensely dark, the face of the heavens being overcast with scurrying black clouds, through which the moon peeped at long intervals only to disappear again and leave a deeper gloom. Not nearly so many people were out, to-night, as commonly thronged the busy streets, and Dashing Dave found the neighbourhood of the gallows-tree quite deserted.

"Danged if I admire the location," growled the Regulator, glancing about him uneasily. "I cannot see what made her appoint this place. Four men swung under this tree, and their combined spirits ought to be sufficient to haunt it. Hello!"

This latter exclamation emanated from a discovery made, as he passed close to the trunk of the tree. It was a white sheet wrapped around the tree, evidently intended to frighten passers-by.

What else could it be for?

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the Regulator, growing bolder where at first he had been considerably frightened. "Rather a *thin* ghost, that. I wonder who put up this job to scare folks?"

Just then there was a step close at hand, and turning quickly Dashing Dave saw a dark figure coming up through the gloom. It stopped when within about twenty yards and remained motionless, and he perceived that it was a man mounted upon a powerful black horse.

Instantly a feeling of terror attacked the Regulator, and he trembled in his moccasins. What did it mean?

Was this—*Deadwood Dick*?

It was a thought truly horrifying to the former executioner of the road-agent.

But, hark! there are footsteps approaching—footsteps soft and stealthy, it seems; then gradually a circle of dark shadowy forms are outlined, through the gloom—draw closer and closer, until the Regulator

is in the immediate presence of a score of masked men. They are *real* men, too, for he feels their iron clutch upon his shoulder; he is thrown to the ground and bound hand and foot.

Then comes forward that man on the back of the powerful black steed.

It is Deadwood Dick—or is it his spirit? Whichever, 'tis the same erect iron frame, clad in jet-coloured buckskin, with black gloves upon the hands, and black trappings for the fiery steed.

The road-agents are grouped around, looking dark and grim, but they speak not. Neither does the object on horseback. All is quiet for a long period; then a blood-curdling burst of laughter from the phantom rings out, and his men start, ready to obey his commands.

He raises one black gauntleted hand and points to the Regulator, then lets it fall again to his side. One of the road-agents now produces a small covered iron pail, which, when opened, proves to hold a bed of glowing coals.

By the aid of a pair of tongs, there is taken from the fire a red-hot piece of iron, shaped like a double dagger, and pressed heavily upon the forehead of Dashing Dave.

There is a hissing, sputtering sound, a sickening stench of burning flesh; a writhing of the prisoner, accompanied by piteous groans, that only excessive pain could cause; then the burning brand is removed and the man who applied it speaks:

"Thus be it that the first brand toward vengeance is burnt. David Gorgon, you are now in the presence of the living followers of Deadwood Dick, whom you executed upon this spot. Upon yonder horse is what is left us of our gallant leader, and his death we owe to you. As he swung, so shall you swing, with our curses upon you."

As he finished speaking, a rope was produced, and one end of it noosed about the Regulator's neck. The other end was then tossed up over an overhanging limb, and a dozen pairs of hands pulled the doomed Regulator up into the air.

The body of Dashing Dave was found swinging beneath the fatal gallows-tree, on the following morning, and pinned to his clothing was a paper containing the following words:

"NOTICE.—Though life may become extinct from the body, the spirit never dies, and know ye, one and all, that this world has not seen the last of the man who swung

beneath this tree, a few nights ago. The following is

DEADWOOD DICK'S VOW OF VENGEANCE :

"As sure as there is a God in heaven to witness this oath, will Deadwood Dick cause the death of the ten men who laid hold of the rope that jerked him into eternity. Also, will he end the career of Dashing Dave, and of as many more as shall hereafter seek to oppose the Phantom Avenger and his faithful band. Look out for the sign of the *double daggers* ! Dashing Dave heads the list, and there are ten more to follow him.

"By request of
"DEADWOOD DICK."

That was all, but it was sufficient to set Deadwood wild with excitement.

CHAPTER V

A FRIEND LOST—A FRIEND GAINED

UNDER the deadly fire of Black Harper's revolver, poor Johnson dropped to the ground without a yell or a groan, for the bullet had penetrated the brain and killed him almost instantly. As she saw her brave protector fall, Leone uttered a cry of pain and indignation ; her hand flew to her girdle, and the next moment she had covered the outlaw with her own gleaming weapon. But he did not seem to think that there was danger in the action, for he laughed mockingly.

"Blaze away, my pretty !" he taunted, lowering his own weapon, and replacing the fired cartridge with a loaded one.

Leone, however, did not fire. She was dumbfounded at the man's reckless coolness ; there was a lack of power in her forefinger to pull the trigger. She now trembled for her safety, for how could she ever hope to contend with a man of nearly twice her size and strength ?

What should she do ? If she turned to flee he would certainly pursue and overtake her.

A sudden thought struck her. She could shoot down his horse, and risk a foot-race with him.

It would be a brutal act to thus kill a helpless dumb beast, but it meant liberty—everything to her.

Leone was an unerring shot, and a swift runner, and determined to make the attempt.

"I am waiting for you to go !" she said, speaking with as much coolness as was

possible under the circumstances, her revolver coming to a level with her gaze.

But the outlaw only laughed. He seemed to take delight in keeping her in suspense—in watching her as the hawk watches its prey.

"Blaze away, my sweetest ducky !" he chuckled, triumphantly. "I'm willing to risk the consequences ;" and while speaking he dropped a thick hide visor over his face.

Leone pulled the hammer of her revolver back to full-cock, decisively.

"One !" she counted, her tone full of assurance that she meant business.

"Two !" after a slight pause. "Come ! if you wish to save yourself, this is the last chance !"

But Black Harper made no motion to move. He gazed at the young girl in cool indifference.

"THREE !"

There was a sharp report, a bright flash in the black night, a shrill scream of pain ; then Leone turned and sped down the gloomy canyon with the swiftness of an arrow.

With a dying groan the powerful steed of the outlaw pitched forward, head-foremost, hurling its unsuspecting rider heavily against a boulder, and rendering him momentarily insensible. But not for long. Soon he was upon his feet, with the blood flowing from a gash in his swarthy cheek, and comprehending the situation at a glance, he uttered a frightful oath, and bounded away in hot pursuit.

Down the canyon several hundred rods in advance, sped Leone, exerting all her power to keep ahead of Black Harper, who now came leaping fiercely after her.

On—on—on ; the moon now came to Leone's aid, and lighted the path for her through the rough canyon ; the tall half-naked pines on either side upon the lights looked like grim ghostly spectres as reflected in the white moonlight. Save the occasional bark of a mountain wolf, nothing was heard but the loudly echoing footsteps of the pursuer and pursued.

Suddenly and without the least warning a figure stepped from behind a tree, a few yards ahead of her, and blocked her path, not only in a commanding form, but also with a pair of Colt's navy sixes, that gleamed in the moonlight like polished silver.

Leone uttered a cry of consternation and stopped stock-still.

"Who are you ?" she demanded, trembling, with fear and apprehension.

"Just the question I was about to ask ; who are *you* ?" replied a pleasant voice, which sounded somewhat feminine, for all

the speaker was clad in male attire—a neatly-fitting suit of tanned buckskin, fringed and ornamented with Indian bead-work; leggings and moccasins likewise, and a hat of the jockey order perched upon the head.

Leone's fears subsided somewhat when she glanced over her new foe, and listened to the words uttered.

"I asked first; you should answer first!" she replied, stepping a little nearer that she might view the stranger.

"Right you are. I am a woman, like yourself, young lady, though my dress would argue different. I am called throughout the Black Hills, Calamity Jane, and have very few friends—for the simple reason I don't want many. But how is it that you, a girl unused to roughing it, are wandering about, here, alone by yourself?"

"That is a secret of my own," replied Leone, not caring to be too trusting with an utter stranger. "Enough is it for you to know that I have come here to escape enemies who have been pursuing me—are, even now, searching for me."

"The deuce you say!" Calamity Jane thrust her revolvers in her belt and came nearer. "Then you've come to precisely the right pal for protection, my dear. Here's what's always on hand to protect the weak and oppressed. From now on you can count Calamity Jane as your right bower in everything."

"Thank you," and Leone gratefully seized the hand of her new-made friend, which was as soft and white as her own. "I will gladly accept of your friendship, for I am all alone, my last friend, except God, having been killed but a few moments ago."

"Yes; I heard a couple of pistol shots up the branch gulch," assented Calamity, "and slid over in the direction to see what was the rumpus. But I heard you comin', so I played hide-an'-coop ahind a tree, till you showed your hand. Reckon I might 'a' socked it to ye, dolorous, if I hadn't spied out that you were a female, like myself."

"You mean you would have shot me?"

"Yes—that's about the size of it."

"And why, pray?"

"Because no one goes up this gulch and comes back again, except me and my pardner—that's why!"

Leone failed to comprehend the explanation, but she did not say so. Her thoughts reverted to her enemy, Black Harper, and she cast a startled glance behind her. Calamity Jane also glanced keenly down the canyon.

"Was any one following you when I stopped your flight?" she demanded.

"Yes," acknowledged Leone, fearful lest the confession should anger the eccentric girl. "I was chased by a ruffian, whom I encountered in trying to elude my other enemies. He shot down my companion, a coloured man, and we tried a foot-race. As you see, I came out ahead."

Calamity's eyes sparkled.

"You're a brick!" she vowed, forcibly emphasizing the declaration by giving the narrator a slap upon the shoulder. "I can make a *man* of you if you give me time. Doubtless your vanquished enemy is even now at the forks of the gulch, pondering over which course to take. Did you get his handle—that is, I mean his name?"

"Oh yes! He called himself Black Harper."

Calamity Jane leaped back, her teeth hard set.

"The devil!" she ejaculated; "you don't mean it!"

"Mean what?"

"That you saw Black Harper?"

"I saw the man who called himself that," replied Leone, wondering why the name so aroused her eccentric friend. "Do you know him?"

"Do I?—well, I reckon!" with a wild, strange laugh, unpleasant to hear.

"Up in Yankton, Dakota, the sheriff wants Harper under the name of Bloody Ben for hoss-stealin'! In Custer, he's Jim Murdock, an' at Cheyenne several of the law-slingers would like to renew his acquaintance as the Bullet-Chawer. Yes, I know him—he's the fellow who—who—but never mind that; you'll hear about it some other time. Come, let's strike for camp!"

CHAPTER VI

GOLDEN BAR

So saying, Calamity Jane led the way rapidly up the gulch, the grade ascending for about a mile, then descending almost precipitately, when they found themselves in what was more like a deep, narrow trough in the mountain, half a foot of water everywhere covering the bottom.

"We'll have to wade here," Calamity explained, in answer to Leone's blank look of astonishment. "Don't be afraid. A little water won't hurt you; you can dry your feet when you get to the Golden Bar, which is the name of my camp."

They waded through the "trough," for

the distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile ; then the canyon ascended a trifle, turned its course abruptly, and suddenly ended in the face of a giant mountain of grey rock.

A round, black hole was the only mode disclosed of furthering progress, it opening into what appeared to be an inter-mountain cavern.

"This is the entrance to Golden Bar," announced Calamity, stepping into the forbidding entrance, and motioning her companion to follow. "Don't be afraid, for there's nothing here to hurt you, while I'm around."

They went in through the black hole and found themselves in Stygian darkness. Not long, however. Calamity gave four shrill, distinct whistles ; then seized Leone by the arm and hurried on, their feet sinking an inch deep into a fine sandy bottom. Presently their hearing was greeted with the savage growling of several dogs, which caused Leone to tremble in alarm.

"They won't hurt you," Calamity observed, reassuringly. "They are chained."

At this instant a flood of dazzling light was poured upon them from a bull's-eye lantern, held in the hand of a man standing several yards away, his other hand clutching a cocked revolver.

"It's only me, Don," the young woman cried ; then down went the weapon and the man advanced.

"You, Jennie," he said, gladness in his tone. "Welcome ! Hello ! who's this you have with you ?"

"A waif I picked up, back yonder near the Forks. Isn't she pretty, though ?"

"Guess so !" echoed the partner, turning the light of the bull's-eye full upon Leone, and glancing her over, admiringly. "What's her name, and where did she come from ?"

"My name is Leone," replied she, flushing a trifle under the man's persistent gaze. "I have come all the way from Texas, chased by enemies. That is all I care to tell at present."

"That is enough," said Calamity, decisively. "So long's you're a good square pard, that's all we care. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. Donald Yates, my pardner in the Golden Bar mines."

Leone acknowledged the introduction with a plain little curtsy.

Mr. Donald Yates was a young man in years, his age probably not exceeding one-and-twenty. In form he was rather above the average height, yet muscularly developed and well-proportioned. In face he was strikingly handsome.

The introduction made, Calamity said :

"I have taken in this young lady, pardner, as one of us. She can wash sand as good as you or I, and what she makes let her keep. Do you say so ?"

"Of course. There is plenty of gold here for all of us—more than we shall ever live to pan out, I fear. Come ! let's get into camp, for I left some fresh venison roasting, and if it should burn we would be defrauded of our supper."

Accordingly young Yates led the way, and they tramped on over the level sand-bar that constituted the floor of the mammoth cavern.

Presently they rounded a projection in the rocky wall, and found themselves before a bright fire of cones, over which was roasting a savoury piece of venison. A pot of fragrant coffee was steeping on a bed of coals ; near the fire was a rude table set with dishes, and looking quite inviting—especially to Leone.

A few stools, a collection of mining implements, and an array of weapons from the rifle down to the knife and cartridge-belt, hung upon the wall.

"There ! this is the city of Golden Bar," laughed Calamity Jane, as she gave the fire a nudge with her foot—a very dainty foot, by the way—and pointed Leone to a chair, or stool. "Off yonder in the darkness, where you hear the dash of water, is our present place of labour."

Donald finished the roasting of the meat, then with a familiar hand arranged the supper.

"Were you in Deadwood to-day, Jennie ?" Yates asked.

"I reckon !" was the laconic reply.

"Thought so. Any news ?"

"None scarcely worth mentioning. Oh ! yes, there is, though. Deadwood Dick's fellers have strung up Dashing Dave !"

"The deuce, you say !"

"Yes—the Regulators found their blowin' chief swingin' beneath the same tree they stretched Dick from, this mornin'. An' last night the gang made a spurt up through town, an' there at their head, ridin' for kill and yellin' like a loony, was Deadwood Dick himself—black hoss, black rider and all !"

Yates laughed, sarcastically.

"What nonsense !" he said, quietly.

"Are they trying to make out that it's the spook, or what ?—for certainly it cannot be aught else, as Deadwood Dick was hanged till there wasn't a breath of life in him. I'll vouch for that."

"Reckon it's his speerit, then," replied Calamity, the firelight playing over her features and revealing a grim expression upon them. "Dick was a cuss, an' no mistake, an' 'twere a pity he got suspended ;

but the Lord forbid I should ever meet his spook."

"Would it scare you?" he asked.

"I reckon. I'm not partial to anything of the spiritual order."

The fire burned low as the trio sat before it; the surrounding shadows seemed to form into grotesque figures; a hushed silence followed in the wake of the ended conversation.

"How much did you pan to-day, Don?" asked Calamity Jane, breaking the silence.

"Yesterday, I panned about five ounces; it is now another day, you will remember!" he replied, glancing at the face of an elegant watch. "If we intend to get any sleep, it's about time we turned in."

To which a general assent was given.

The young man rolled himself up in a large Mexican blanket and lay down near the fire, while Calamity led the way off into the darkness where more blankets were piled upon a bed of leaves and sand. Here she and Leone sought slumber, of which the latter was very much in need.

Hours later, a shout from Donald awoke them, and they found breakfast—though it was in reality noon—already awaiting them. To Leone's surprise she found the cavern now flooded with daylight instead of fire-light, a large opening at the northern end of the mammoth apartment furnishing it.

"Come! come! Your dreams must have been pleasant to have kept you sleeping so long," said Yates, placing the breakfast upon the table.

After the meal was dispatched, the strange woman took down her rifle and prepared to quit the cavern. A whistle from her lips brought to her side from a further part of the cavern, a large, iron-framed, savage-eyed horse of the Mexican breed, accompanied by a brace of ferocious-looking dogs.

"You will not be afraid to remain here with Don, will you?" she asked of Leone, as she saddled the horse.

"I—I guess not," faltered her guest, hardly knowing if she was speaking the truth or not. "How long will you be gone?"

"Only a few hours, probably. You can amuse yourself at washing sand. All you get is yours."

Then she mounted and galloped away through the cavern, followed by the baying dogs, and disappearing through the black hole by which Leone had first come into the cavern.

After watching her vanish, Leone turned toward where Donald had been standing. But, strangely, he was not there.

He too had disappeared!

CHAPTER VII

THE "SLOP-BUCKET"

AGAIN we return to Deadwood, the chief centre of immigration to the Black Hills placers.

'Tis an hour bordering nigh upon midnight. The streets are thronged with people—an intermingling of miners, who have either come in after supplies, or to have a big drink—of "citizens," as rough and uncouth-looking as the miners themselves—of "tenderfoots," or new arrivals of swearing ruffians and desperadoes—of a great, indiscriminate mass, comprising people no doubt honest and upright, and again criminals of the worst class to be found west of the "Mississip."

Nor are all out in the streets. There are saloons, dance-houses, and gaming-hells in great number, and these are crowded to overflowing.

Worst among its bad class, combining saloon, card-house, and dance-house all in one, was a rough, uninviting shanty of huge dimensions, doing a thriving business despite its name—

"THE SLOP-BUCKET."

As we enter its grimy portals all is activity and excitement.

It is the same old story, only conducted in a rougher manner—dancing here, drinking there; gambling in this place, fighting in that; singing, swearing, and blaspheming most revolting and horrible to bear.

A tumbledown stage in one corner, before which an orchestra of a banjo and fiddle makes shocking attempts to produce music, contains the attraction of the evening, as the posters on every side announce, in the person of "Silver Sal"; "The Bossest of all Boss Gals."

Seated at a table in one of the quietest corners of the saloon, and watching the scene with an expression of disgust depicted upon his handsome features, was a young man of about twenty years, who seemed out of place among this audience. He sat alone by his table, minding his own business; yet this did not prevent him becoming the centre of many curious glances, and some broad hints questioning his right there, were thrown out, loud enough to reach his hearing. But this did not seem to disconcert him in the least.

"That's Buffalo Ben—heerd of him, 'ain't ye?" one of the crowd, a burly Montanian, asked, scowling at the object of his remark. "He's some on the shoot, they say, an' ar' down from nigh t' the British line."

"What the devil do he want hyar?" responded the individual addressed. "We don't want no Britishers in *this* consarn, not if ole Minnesota Mike ar' dreamin' correct. I say, young feller, w'at d'ye surspect ye're doin' round hyar, anyhow?"

"It appears to me that I'm mindin' my own business," replied Buffalo Ben, quietly, "and it would be advisable for you and your crowd to follow suit. I don't wish to pick a quarrel with you, but you've got to mind your own business—that's all!" And the tone of the young man was decidedly positive.

"Is that *all*?" sneered the Minnesotian, mockingly, as he strode nearer. "Young feller, do you know what I can do? Why, I can just chaw yer ear off in one secont by the watch, roast me if I can't."

"I haven't the least doubt about it," retorted Ben, coolly, eyeing his giant insulter, indifferently. "I've met wild beasts in my time that could chaw down a man without winking. It must be that you belong to that ferocious order!"

The rough uttered a curse, and a snarl like an enraged bull.

And a general laugh went up from the nearest bystanders who had overheard the conversation.

"You had better move on," added Buffalo Ben, drawing one of his polished revolvers, cocked and ready for instant use. "I don't feel in a talkative mood to-night; but if you'll come around some other time, we'll converse. If there is need for any further words, on my part, this evening, I'll let this speak for me!" and he indicated what he meant by a nod at the grim six-shooter.

The Minnesotian glared at his cool adversary in rage and astonishment. He had little expected to see such an exhibition of "nerve," from one who appeared to be simply a youth. He was one of the Dead-wood Regulators, as was his companion, the Montanian, and had been a domineering, bullying fellow from boyhood up.

"You'd better leave him be, Mike!" argued the Montanian, endeavouring to pull the offended giant away. "Come! let's go an' imbibe!"

"All right," accepted the Minnesotian, with alacrity. "I never refuse p'izen, Deer-Foot; but arter'ds won't I lay out that young whelp? *I reckon!*"

And he shook his fist at Buffalo Ben, threateningly, as he walked toward the bar.

Buffalo Ben sat quietly at his table, watching all that was going on about him. Especially did his eyes linger upon Silver

Sal, and a frown stole over his features while his teeth shut hard together, as he continued to gaze at her.

First she was on the stage, singing her songs; then she was mingling with the ruffian audience and drinking with whoever offered to stand treat.

Several times she passed near to where Buffalo Ben sat, and the young man half rose to his feet, his lips parted, as if about to speak; but she pushed on without noticing him, and he resumed his seat, his face growing dark with anger.

"The ill-fates take her!" he muttered, fiercely. "Will I never get an opportunity to speak to the wretch?"

After waiting and watching for upward of an hour longer, Buffalo Ben left his seat, and slinging his rifle on his back, sauntered toward the door, intending to seek the street for a little fresh air, the atmosphere in the "Slop-Bucket" being rank and heavy with tobacco smoke, the odour of very bad whisky, and the vitiated breath of that bad crowd.

But his action was immediately noticed by Minnesota Mike, who was approaching at this juncture, and he instantly blockaded the way with his burly form—Deer-Foot, his pard, close behind.

"See hyar, young fellow!" began the Minnesotian, a greenish glare coming into his eyes, "we've got a small ham-bone ter pick wi' you afore you git out o' here. A while ago you called me a dirty, knock-kneed, cross-eyed son-of-a-gun—now, didn't ye?"

"Not that I remember of," replied Ben, allowing his hand to rest upon the butt of a pistol in his belt. "I rarely call a person undeserved names."

"Ye don't, hey? Ye didn't call us hoss-thieves now, did ye, you contemptible little cuss?"

"I called you nothing of the kind, so get out of my path or I'll *do* something worse than call names!" was the stern answer. "Come! move aside, or I'll make two corpses here within the next two minutes."

"*Will* ye, though?" roared the giant, and the next instant he and the Montanian sprung forward, each clutching a long gleaming knife in hand.

But before they could strike a blow, or even before Buffalo Ben could draw his weapon, there were two sharp reports, and just as a half-score of masked men sprung in through the open casements, the two ruffians tumbled to the floor without a groan.

Then high above the din and confusion rang the cry:

"Clean out the den! *Double-daggers* and vengeance for Deadwood Dick!"

Yells of horror, rage, and consternation arose from the lips of the surprised audience; curses mingled with pistol-shots; the clashing and ringing of steel; and dying groans, were the ruling sounds of that awful moment.

"Douse the glim! out with the light," yelled the alarmed proprietor of the "Slop-Bucket." And in a twinkling, the whole establishment was in inky darkness. Of course firing now ceased, for friends could not be told from enemies.

Blindly the crowd mingled together, every person on the alert; all expecting to be the recipient of a blow which would renew the battle. After some delay the killed and wounded were dragged to one side so as not to be trampled on; then, some one more daring than the rest ventured to light a lamp.

In an instant each man scanned his neighbour, expecting to find himself contiguous to an enemy.

But lo! and behold, the road-agents had taken advantage of the darkness to make their escape. It was no use to follow them.

Once more the "Slop-Bucket" puts forth her lights, and then all rush forward to count the victims of the affray.

But ha! what is this they see staring them in the face?

There are a score of dead and dying, and upon the forehead of each, slashed deep, with a keen knife, is that terrible emblem of Deadwood Dick's avowed vengeance—a bloody *double dagger*!

CHAPTER VIII

A WOLF IN THE FOLD

LEONE was considerably alarmed when she found that Yates was not in sight.

Where had he gone? What was his motive? Had she, after all, been entrapped into this place for some foul purpose?

Suddenly, behind a large boulder that had some time become dislodged from the ceiling and now lay upon the sandy floor, she came upon the young miner, crouching out of her sight, and laughing quietly to himself.

"This is not kind of you!" she cried, a trifle indignant, "getting me alarmed and excited, because I thought I was left alone. Why did you hide away?"

"Just to see what you would say or do," he replied, laughing heartily at her sulks, as he left his retreat. "Don't get mad, ow; 'twas only in fun."

"Well, don't do it again, will you?"

"No; I promise you. Now, come and I'll initiate you into the mysteries of gold-mining, so that you'll be able to earn your three dollars a day, and not half try."

And he was as good as his word. He taught her how to separate the fine golden particles from the coarser sands by the aid of the sluice-boxes.

And ere long she was able to do as good execution in her work as he. The sand was not hard to get, being loosely packed over the bottom, and it took only a few panfuls to prove that it abounded richly with gold of a superior quality.

Leone took to mining with a zeal and earnestness that showed she was not afraid to work; and Donald Yates observed her, with admiration beaming from his eyes.

Thus they worked and conversed, and ere long light ceased to come in through the natural window, and the miner announced that it was night.

"We'll eat supper, now," he said, "and then count up our pile. Yesterday I realized more pure gold than ever before, but shall fall short to-day, because I spent too much time in watching you."

"Which was your own fault. I did not tell you to stare at me all the time," flashed back Leone.

"I know, my dear lady, but I couldn't help it. You are so charming and beautiful."

The supper was soon prepared, out of venison, coffee, and crackers, and dispatched in silence. Yates was not in a talkative mood, and Leone did not urge him into conversation. When they were through eating and the table was cleared away, Donald produced a pair of tiny scales, and poured his dainty pile of shining dust into the pan to be weighed.

"Only three ounces!" he announced, after adjusting the weights; "but it is finer gold than usual."

He next brought forth from a niche in the wall a large leathern pouch, half-filled with something that Leone at once concluded was gold. Into this he poured the gold he had just weighed; then held it all triumphantly aloft.

"It's all gold!" he cried, with enthusiasm—"pure and marketable. At the San Francisco mint it would fetch five thousand dollars in greenbacks, any minute—but I'd rather have the gold, the pure shining stuff that gleams so richly when you look at it. Give me your pile and I'll weigh it."

Accordingly Leone's gold was poured into the pan, in a little yellow heap, and the weights adjusted.

"Five ounces, by hokey!" cried Donald, in surprise, "and that in half a day, too! Why, that is extraordinary, and if you continue in that vein all the while, you'll soon have your fortune made."

"Five ounces; isn't that grand?" cried Leone, in delight. "I had no idea there was half an ounce of the stuff."

A man, who, unbeknown to either of our friends, was lurking among the black shadows of the cavern, just within hearing, pricked up his ears at the gratuitous information so unwittingly given.

"Do you think Calamity Jane will come back to-night?" Leone asked, securing her pouch of precious stuff to her belt.

"That's hard telling," replied Donald, as he threw himself upon a blanket in front of the fire, and lighted his pipe. "She may, and she may not. If she gets very much interested in cards and has any luck, you may not see her in a week."

"Then I don't want to stay here!"

"Why not, pray? No one will harm you!"

"I'm not so sure about *that*. How do I know but you are one of the worst villains in existence; and she may be a confederate? You will remember I am a stranger in the Black Hills, and know nothing of you or your antecedents."

"True; but you need not fear. When you find Donald Yates less than a gentleman you may believe yourself in danger. Until then please have faith in me, and my ability to protect you."

The ruddy firelight playing over his features made him look handsomer than ever, stretched as he was at full length, thereby displaying his manly figure to full advantage.

When ten o'clock came, and Calamity Jane had not returned, he said:

"You can retire now if you wish, as Calamity will probably not be in to-night. I will smoke another pipe, take a turn about the premises, and then take a nap myself."

Leone accordingly sought the couch on which she had lain the previous night, and soon she was fast asleep, the labour of mining having fatigued her.

It must have been long past midnight, when she was startled from her slumber by an intuition of danger, or something, she knew not what, until she gave a terrified glance, and then uttered one piercing shriek of horror as she beheld a human face bending close to hers.

She recognized the face in a single instant as that of the outlaw and ruffian, Black Harper!

CHAPTER IX

DEADWOOD DICK AGAIN

BETWEEN midnight and morning of that same night of the road-agent's raid upon the "Slop-Bucket," in Deadwood, the whole band made a grand dash up the main street and disappeared in the darkness, leaving behind them their echoing shouts of laughter.

Early in the following morning, the news of what had happened at the "Slop-Bucket" was spread broadcast through the Magic City, and in all the diggings in the immediate surroundings. Great was the excitement that prevailed.

Notices offering a large reward for the capture of the outlaw gang, dead or alive, were posted up in conspicuous places all over the town; and the Regulator band, whose number had been diminished by the loss of a leader and ten men, was reorganized and enlarged to a well-armed company of fifty.

For a commander was chosen a big brawny Missourian, with indomitable courage and immense muscle. His name was Uriah Denby.

By his direction ten of the band were sent into the surrounding mountains and gorges, well-armed and provisioned, and ordered to keep a sharp look out for the road-agents.

And when evening once more settled over the metropolis, the people thereof felt a better sense of security than they had, earlier in the day.

But this feeling was dissipated, when the Cheyenne stage arrived and a dozen badly scared passengers told their story.

The stage had been stopped not ten miles below Deadwood, in a lonely spot, by the so-called Phantom Road-Agent and his full band, numbering in all about thirty masked men, and the passengers had been robbed of their watches, money, jewellery, and fire-arms, aggregating in worth about a thousand dollars. Besides, Bond & Moxey, the Deadwood brokers, had five thousand dollars in paper money locked up in the treasure-box, and this was burst open by the daring gang, and the money appropriated.

Altogether it was the most daring robbery on the road for months. By the stage-driver the Phantom Road-Agent had sent a letter directed to Uriah Denby, chief of the Regulators. Great curiosity was aroused when this was delivered to the new captain, who sat smoking in the Metropolitan bar. His men and a crowd of citizens crowded around, eager to learn what the Prince of the Road had to say.

"Come! what's it say?" demanded the anxious throng. "Read out loud."

"Humph!" said Denby, looking a trifle grim, "this is what it says:

"MR. URIAH DENBY, ESQ.—By unanimous vote, you have been chosen leader of the so-styled Deadwood Regulators. You may be an honest man and a truly good fellow, but you have, in your old age, mistaken your vocation. I do not wish to strike you, nor those under you. Deadwood Dick's vow of vengeance has been fulfilled, in the death of the ten Regulators at the "Slop-Bucket." But, if you move against my men, it extends to you. Therefore, I warn you in time. Myself you cannot harm. My spirit has a long lease of liberty. It is with you every day, and knows all your intentions. Again I advise you to remain passive, and not turn my avengers against you. Adieu. These lines traced by the spirit hand of

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"Well, by thunder!" was the general comment, when, after a long silence, the assemblage found their tongues. "That's the essence of cheekiness, if ever thar was any. What d'ye think, Denby?"

"I don't know what to think, boys!" replied the new chief, candidly.

"Will you move against the agents?" asked the senior partner of the Ida Gray mine.

"Certainly!" decided Denby, without a moment's consideration. "I am not scared bad at this so-called warning, and shall go on just the same as though I had not received it."

"I see no way to move just yet," said the new Regulator chief, in answer to a question of a prominent speculator. "The way the matter stands, I don't know the place to strike at. The gang are here one minute, and there the next: in fact they are as uncertain as a swarm of lively fleas."

So matters rested, and the crowd dispersed, all conversing on the all-absorbing topic of the day—the deeds and doings of Deadwood Dick.

The "Metropolitan" gaming-parlour, though without separation from the bar and dancing parts of the big apartment, was yet distinct from them, only a class seeking gaming amusement being allowed beyond the boundary. The rougher set generally hovered near the bar and dancers, so that the assemblage at the gaming-tables was less savage and desperate.

Women as well as men played for stakes in Deadwood.

One woman to be found here, night and day, and a very paying card to the management, was the "Veiled Queen," as everybody called her, from the fact that her face was ever veiled. She played a good square game, and was regarded as the richest card-player in Deadwood.

On this evening of which we have been writing, the Veiled Queen sat at her table, which was not surrounded as usual with a throng of lookers-on.

Only one man was playing with her. Nevertheless the game was an exciting one, for the hitherto successful queen was losing heavily. Almost every known game of cards had been played; still the man went on winning, as coolly as if he was not playing to win.

He was a little bewhiskered gamester from the silver mines of Idaho, named Lotus, and was reputed in that section never to have lost a game.

"The bank's broke!" said the queen, at last, throwing down the cards. "I'll not play another game with you, for you've won five thousand dollars, already, and that's quite enough."

Without a word the gambler raked in his stakes, and "pulled out," leaving the card queen to herself, for the gaming part of the building was nearly deserted, owing to the recent arrival of the stage with its crowd of robbed passengers.

As she sat there her gaze wandered carelessly over the crowd; then suddenly she started violently, and uttered an inaudible exclamation, as she beheld two men approaching her.

They were the two men whom we first saw in pursuit of Leone—Jasper Leslie and Curtis Sydnor.

They had come into Deadwood but an hour since, from an unsuccessful hunt in the mountains, and were not in the best of humour, as may be surmised.

"It's devilish queer what has become of the cursed girl!" Leslie growled, looking horribly haggard and gaunt, from his long jaunt. "I'll break every bone in her body, if I once get her again."

"That will not help the matter at all!" replied Sydnor, sneeringly. "You promised me the girl for my wife within three months if I would not foreclose the mortgage on that ranch of yours, and the time's been up for two months. To-morrow I shall take the first stage for Cheyenne, on my way back to Texas. If you ever show your face in or about Austin in the future, I will have you

arrested and lynched as a *wife-murderer* !”

“Bah ! I do not believe Celeste is dead. I have always had an idea that she swam to shore that terrible night on the Missouri. Anyhow, you could prove nothing.”

“Couldn’t I ? I could swear I saw you pitch her overboard from the upper deck of the steamboat ; I can also testify that you abused her two children, until you forced them to flee ; that you mortgaged *their* property to me, and even tried to assassinate the boy. All these circumstances, mentioned in a Texas court of justice, could not fail to insure you a halter and a grave—three feet under the ground. How do you like the picture, Jasper Leslie ?”

“It isn’t an attractive one,” growled the elder ; “still, I am not afraid of you. Hello ! here is the Veiled Queen we heard about. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Sydnor. I’ll play you a game of cards for the ranch at Austin. If you win, it is yours ; if I win it is mine. Will you do it ?”

“Certainly not. The property belongs to me rightfully, now, and I’d be a fool to gamble it away. We will, however, try this sharper a hand for a hundred a side, just to pass away time. Will you play, madam ?”

“With pleasure, sirs,” replied the queen, bringing out a fresh pack of cards from a drawer under the table. “What shall it be ?”

“Old sledge,” replied Leslie. “I’m better on that than on other games.”

“Very well—sledge it is then. Plank ‘em !” and the mysterious woman laid a crisp hundred dollar bill down for them to cover.

Both Sydnor and Leslie followed suit, and then the game began.

The game was played through and resulted in her favour.

“Curse you !” cried Sydnor, losing his temper as well as his money, “your luck cannot be lasting. I’ll stake a thousand against you.”

“And I, too !” growled miserly Leslie, hoping to retrieve himself.

“Very well. The more the merrier !” replied the gambler with a strange laugh. “I can accommodate you with ten thousand if you wish.”

“No ; I do not care to risk so much. I will, however, make it five thousand if you say so.”

“All right ; I’m suited.”

Accordingly fifteen thousand dollars—ten of it in checks—was planked, and the cards dealt. Sydnor considered himself an adept at gaming, but it proved that neither he nor Leslie was a match for the Veiled Queen.

Down went the last pasteboard, and the game was hers.

“Woman, I believe you are in league with the devil !” hissed Sydnor, rising. “I’ve got enough gaming for to-night, but remember, I’m bound to get back what I’ve lost some time.”

“Very well, sir. I shall always be happy to accommodate you,” replied the woman.

But after they were nearly lost among the crowd, she turned and shook her clinched right hand after them, her teeth grating together fiercely.

“Oh ! I know you, Jasper Leslie !” she muttered under her breath—“know you, and loathe and hate you. And now that Fate has cast you across my path, I shall not let you escape until I have made you feel the full measure of my power—of my vengeance !”

CHAPTER X

IN THE MOUNTAINS

“HA ! ha !” laughed Black Harper, triumphantly, bending his repulsive face still closer, and pressing his coarse lips to Leone’s cheek. “Ha ! ha ! my pretty dear ; so I’ve found you at last, eh ? Didn’t think I was going to let such a pigeon as you escape my trap, did you ?”

And the ruffian held her head between his great hands and forcibly kissed her upon the lips, to her horror and disgust.

She struggled desperately to get free, but it was no use. He had bound her, hand and foot, while she slept, and she was helpless. But he had neglected to gag her, and she uttered shriek after shriek for assistance.

“Donald—Mr. Yates !” she screamed, shrilly—“help ! help ! help !”

“Oh ! you needn’t screech for help, ‘cause no one’ll hear you, unless et ar’ that cuss over thar by the camp-fire, an’ he’s bound and gagged. So shut up if you don’t want me to crack you beside o’ the head. Sit up—there, like that, an’ I’ll kerry ye to the light.”

Leone was so terrified that she could no longer scream ; therefore she suffered herself to be dragged toward the fire without offering vocal resistance.

Here the outlaw seated her upon one of the camp-stools, young Yates occupying a similar position, with a wooden gag fastened in his mouth.

At this juncture there was a faint cry audible to the hearing of all, seeming to come from the direction of the canyon entrance to the cavern.

"What the deuce was that?" growled Black Harper, laying hold of a revolver butt, and peering off into the gloom.

"Better go and see, you coward!" taunted Leone, sneeringly. "You are 'fraid of the squeal of a rat, I do believe."

"Not much, I ain't; but that warn't no rat music, I know well enough. Listen to that, will you?"

Just then there was a sound of half-suppressed laughter from off in the darkness; then the indistinct murmur of voices.

"Some one is coming to our rescue, thank God!" exclaimed Leone. "Have courage, Mr. Yates; help is coming!"

"No, I'm cursed if it is!" roared Black Harper, drawing and cocking his revolvers. "I'll make sausage-meat out of 'em, see 'f I don't now," and he leaped off into the gloom, in search of the intruders.

"Now is our time, Mr. Yates!" exclaimed Leone, in a shrill whisper. "We must contrive to get free, while he is absent. Can you get your hands or feet loose?"

Donald shook his head in the negative.

"Wait, then; I'll try and get that gag out. Hitch along on yer stool toward me."

By their united efforts they soon succeeded in bringing themselves close together; then the miner bent his head down to Leone's side, and with the fingers of one hand she picked the knot out of the cord that bound the gag. It was a tedious undertaking, but she accomplished it at last, and the gag fell from his mouth.

"There, so much is done," she whispered, joyfully. "Quick, now try and see if you cannot loosen the cords that bind my hand."

"Yes; bend a little lower, please—there, that's the kind," and the young man attacked the hard drawn knots with a will. "I wonder who it was that made the noises, off there. Friends?"

"No! Nobody made them, except myself. I am a ventriloquist, and sent that ruffian off on a fool's errand, in order to give us a chance to make our escape. God grant that he may not return before we get our hands and feet free!"

"To which I say amen," replied Yates, fervently. "Confound the rope; it's drawn tighter than a lock, and I don't believe I can loosen it. Hark!"

Footsteps heavy and noisy were approaching, rapidly.

"My Heaven! 'tis Black Harper returning!" exclaimed Leone, and she spoke truly, for in the next moment the outlaw leaped in upon the scene, uttering a volley of terrible blasphemy.

"No, ye don't, my conspiring ducklings—my beloved schemers!" he cried, lifting Leone bodily in his arms, and carrying her to another seat, then returning to Donald and administering him several sound slaps in the face. "Thort you war goin' to escape just as easy 's ye please, didn't ye? Haw! haw! haw!"

"We will outwit you yet," said Leone, nearly ready to cry over her defeat.

"I don't think so, my beautiful bricktop. When it comes daylight, I shall take you to my ranch in the depths of the mountains, and there you an' I will live in peace an' plenty till we ascend the golden stairs. This feller, here, I shall leave a temporary inmate o' the Golden Bar, until I can bring back my band o' fellers an' set 'em to work."

So saying the ruffian threw himself down in front of the fire.

The trio sat in silence until nearly midnight, then they fell asleep.

Once more the light of day penetrated the mammoth cavern. The outlaw arose and proceeded to cook breakfast out of what comprised the Golden Bar stock of provender, and soon had a palatable meal set out.

He offered Leone a portion of the food, and she accepted and ate it, her quick wit and judgment telling her that she had best not lose any strength if she ever hoped to escape, when she would need it all. But poor Yates was left out in the cold, Black Harper obstinately refusing to let him eat, despite all our heroine's entreaties in his behalf.

That day passed by, Black Harper sleeping by spells in front of the camp-fire, but never so lost in slumber as to not know what was going on about him.

When night once more slanted her grim, gloomy shadows into the cavern, he rose and prepared another meal, this time feeding Donald and Leone, each in turn; then he permitted them to lie down on separate blankets, while he took up his vigil, with only the crackling of the glowing fire for company.

Thus three days more were passed at Golden Bar; and on the morning of the fourth the outlaw said:

"I have bin waitin' heer in hopes o' capturin' Calamity Jane. But it' pears she ain't comin'; so I reckon we'll quit this place, fer present, an' go to my den in the Hills."

Arrangements were accordingly made. Leone and Yates were bound together, in such a manner that they could in no way loose each other's bonds. Their feet were

then cut free, and they were prepared for a long tramp.

At Black Harper's direction they quitted Golden Bar, and emerged into the canyon beyond, he bringing up the rear with a revolver ready for use should they make an attempt to run.

After a long, tiresome tramp they reached the forks where the main canyon crossed the transverse one.

No halt was made, but the journey continued steadily up the other gulch, the ruffian captor allowing his prisoners no time to rest.

"For God's sake, where are you taking us?" Yates demanded, speaking for the first time in several hours. "How long are we to keep up this tramp through desolate canyons?"

"Till I git ready to let ye stop," replied Harper, grimly. "Reckon ef we keep on steddy, we'll get to my ranch about midnight."

At that moment a band of horsemen galloped around a curve in the canyon at full tilt, making rather an imposing spectacle. All save one were mounted upon snow-white horses, and they were alike with one exception, all clad in the picturesque garb of the mountaineer.

The one exception was in the advance of all the rest mounted upon a fiery black steed. He was clad from top to toe in black habiliments; the saddle and accompanying trappings were black, as also were the gloves upon his shapely hands and the half-mask upon his face.

The others were masked, too, and all were armed with polished rifles, revolvers, and knives, and as looked upon by a casual observer, might have been pronounced a dangerous gang of men.

The moment Black Harper saw them he uttered a savage oath, and turning quickly, he sped back down the canyon as fast as he could run, leaving his captives at the spring. Some of the horsemen gave instant chase, but the main portion came to a halt in front of Donald and Leone, the Black Rider at their head.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Leone," Yates whispered reassuringly. "We can consider these fellows our friends, I judge, for it is Deadwood Dick, the phantom, and his jolly road-agents!"

CHAPTER XI

TO THE STRONGHOLD

THE road-agents did not speak for several moments, but finally one who appeared to be a sort of a lieutenant, broke the silence:

"Well, strangers, what does this look like? Rather suggestive that you've been took in, ain't it?"

"Yes, I should say so. We have been the captives of the wretch who just dug out, for nigh on four days. Your coming has at least relieved the monotony, for we may be changing from bad hands into worse."

"You need not fear us. Do you know who and what we are?"

"You are Deadwood Dick's band of road-agents, are you not?"

"Exactly—the same as this gentleman, or spirit, upon the black horse is the Phantom Chief of our band. Though he may appear mortal to you, that does not make him so. He was hung in Deadwood, not long ago, but his spirit came back to us, after we had buried his body in six feet of ground."

Donald smiled.

"Of course it's none of my business," he said, bowing; "but I am not so much of a blockhead as to swallow such trash. Whether the black horseman is Deadwood Dick or no, I will not say; but I'll bet if you will kindly lend me a revolver, I can drop him out of the saddle in short order."

The lieutenant dismounted and cut the prisoner's bonds, a low laugh breaking from his lips.

"Can't fool you, can I? Well, all the difference is, if you had believed what others believe, you would have been set free and given an escort nearly back to Deadwood. As it is, we shall take you along to our retreat, where you will have a chance to join our band and swear the oath of allegiance, or remain in durance until we see fit to set you at liberty. You see this ghost business is serving us admirably, and we dare not let you go lest you should release our valuable cat from its bag of confinement."

"Then yon man is the original Prince of the Road?" asked Donald.

"I am the same!" replied Deadwood Dick, riding closer, and raising his mask, and disclosing the ever-handsome face of Edward Harris.

At this instant Leone uttered a cry of mingled astonishment and joy, as she sprang toward the young road-agent.

"Gerald! Gerald! my dear brother!" she exclaimed, her face pale and shining. "Is it possible?"

"Your brother, miss?" echoed the Prince of the Road, incredulously. "I'm not your brother. I am Deadwood Dick."

"No! no! you are my brother Gerald, whom I have not seen in three years. Do you think you can deceive me?"

"I am not trying to deceive you, my dear

young lady. You are the one that is deceived, if you have taken me for your brother. I have but one sister—Anita, who lives in Deadwood. Do I resemble the brother to whom you refer?"

"Oh! yes!" cried Leone, excitedly, "and I still believe you are he. You have his face, his eyes, his hair, and his form."

"Ah!" said Deadwood Dick, thoughtfully, "I see, or I think I do. My dear girl, I am not your brother, but I can tell you of him. Be calm now, for I am going to tell you that he is dead. Some time since a young man was arrested and hung in Deadwood, by the Regulators, for me, he being the exact counterpart of myself. He told the lynchers that his name was Gerald Hawk; but they were positive that he was Deadwood Dick, and so they strung him up; and the world still believes they hanged me, till I was dead."

"I heard of the fate of the unfortunate young man, and with my men, went and cut down the body, brought it into the mountains, and gave it a decent burial. Since then people have declared me a ghost, and I have helped to keep up the deception. Over the grave of your brother I swore a vow of vengeance—not so much on the account of his untimely end, but because it was a good excuse to further my aims in avenging other atrocities—and I have kept it to the letter."

At this juncture the road-agents who had been in pursuit of Black Harper galloped back, and rejoined the band.

"Well? How about the ruffian?" asked Deadwood Dick, seeing that they brought back no prisoner.

"He's stretched out, down in the canyon, yonder," replied one of the men. "He war runnin' at the top o' his speed, when all of a sudden he stubbed his toe, an' down he went, like a thousan' o' brick. When we got to him, we found that he had broke his neck, short off."

"A good riddance," said the Prince, quietly.

"If you are of a gold-loving turn of mind," said Donald, resolving to make the best of an undesirable situation, "you might as well return to the poor cuss, and remove from his person several thousand dollars worth of gold, which belongs to me and Miss Leone, here. I suppose you will appropriate it, but you might as well have it as any one else."

"Lieutenant Audley, you may take part of the men and go for the gold," directed Deadwood Dick, after a moment's thought. "With the rest I will return to the strong-

hold, whither you can follow. Miss Hawk—for I am led to suppose that is your name—you and your companion will accompany us. Gaspard, you and Le Greuf can dismount and walk, while these footsore twain take your places in the saddle."

Accordingly arrangements were made as the young chief directed. Lieutenant Audley with a dozen men set off down the canyon, while two saddles were emptied for the occupancy of Donald and Leone; then, after Deadwood Dick had replaced his mask, the remainder of the band took an opposite course up the canyon.

They galloped on for perhaps a mile; then struck into a narrow path, single file, that led up a nearly perpendicular and densely wooded mountain-side. The ascent was extremely arduous and difficult for the horses, and the riders were frequently required to bend on a level with the saddle to keep from being swept out of their seats.

"If this is the way to your stronghold, why don't you clear away the branches?" said Donald, addressing Deadwood Dick, who was just in advance.

"For the simple reason that few would attempt to ascend here, in the face of the contending obstacles, with an idea of finding me and my band. To an inexperienced eye, this path would be deemed too rough and obstructed for a horse's ascent."

"Your retreat is on the mountain-top, then?"

"Yes—and here we are," was the reply, as they rode abruptly up out of the thicket on to a large, level plateau. On all the surrounding edges rose tall thickets of beach and young lindens, which completely hid the view of the neighbouring country—fenced in the plateau, and made it a secret to the outside world. There was about half an acre of the top, and it was as if the mountain had been sawn off, leaving a smooth floor of solid rock. Upon it were built two cabins, composed of rocks, clay, and logs, and joining each other; also a row of thatched sheds, for the horses.

"By George! this is a capital stronghold!" cried Yates, his sharp glance taking in the scene immediately.

The remainder of Dick's party had by this time reached the plateau, and after all had dismounted, the chief led the way toward the smaller of the two cabins, Leone and Donald bringing up the rear.

They all entered and gazed about them. The cabin was divided into two apartments, the larger one, in which they stood, being carpeted with wolf-skin robes, with the furry side up. The walls were also hung in

the same style, and the effect was, with a ruddy fire blazing on a hearth in a distant corner, truly cheering.

"It's perfectly splendid," said Leone; "but where is the lieutenant's wife you spoke of?"

"Her apartment is in the other building. Be seated, and make yourself at home, and I will call her. In the adjoining room yonder, you will find conveniences for making your toilet, if you wish."

And bowing the Prince of the Road retired through a side door into the other cabin, which was given over to Lieutenant Audley, his wife, and the band. A moment later a man entered with a couple of torches which he thrust into crevices in the wall and then retired.

Presently a young woman entered, bearing a tray of fragrant, steaming coffee and roasted venison. It was the lieutenant's wife. She was of medium stature and rather stoutly built, yet she was evidently not out of her teens.

She set down the tray and advanced toward Leone with extended hands, a smile of welcome upon her lips, an expression of admiration in her eye.

"So you are the new arrival Captain Dick is so rapturous over, eh?" she said, with a pleasant little laugh. "Well, well, I'm sure I admire his taste. Ah! you have a friend, eh?"

"Yes, this is Mr. Yates," replied Leone. "You I suppose are Mrs. Audley."

"I am. My husband"—and just then it appeared there was a tinge of bitterness in her tone—"is a lieutenant in Captain Dick's band. Perhaps you saw him."

"So I did, but he was masked, and I could not see much of his face. I think your chief is very handsome."

"So he is, and as noble as he is handsome. I've often wished it had fallen to my lot to have won him instead of Fred Audley."

Deadwood Dick sauntered in later in the evening, and the trio conversed together merrily.

All were thus engaged when one of the men stuck his head in at the door, and announced that a man wished to see the chief.

"Show him in!" ordered the Prince, and then entered one whom none had expected to see, in the person of the girl dare-devil—Calamity Jane!

CHAPTER XII

WHO IS THE TRAITOR?

It was indeed Calamity, and all recognized her in a moment.

"How in the name of all that is wonderful did you find your way here?" exclaimed Dick, springing to his feet and extending his black-gloved hand. "I would have sooner expected old Satan, than you."

The young woman laughed in her quiet fashion, as she shook hands all around.

"I am 'bout as much surprised as the rest o' ye, I reckon," was her reply. "I shouldn't 'a' cum, only I didn't find no one at my caboose; so I set out on the trail, and run across some o' your gang, and on bein' assured that you weren't no spirit, I made up my mind to come up an' pay you a visit. And who should I see here but my old pard, Don, and my new pard, Leone."

"Yes. I and my boys met them down the canyon a piece, in company with Black Harper; but the tough turned tail and dug out when he saw us, and left his prisoners in our charge. So you come up with Audley and the boys, did you?"

"With the boys, but not with Audley. He has gone on to Deadwood."

"To Deadwood?" echoed the young chief.

"Yes. It was my information, though, that sent him there. Dick, there is among the members of your band no less a viper than a *traitor*!"

"What? A traitor among my men? Impossible!"

"Nay! not impossible. There is some one of your band in communication with the Deadwood Regulators; of this I am positive, for not ten hours ago I heard old Uriah Denby give his men a perfect description of this place, in the Metropolitan. More'n that, they're plannin' together how to come an' take you. It seems that they have been advised of your strong defence, and don't know just how to go to work. I told Audley about it, and so he went on to Deadwood to learn what he could."

Then the conversation turned on to other topics.

The morning dawned before any one was aware of it, so engrossed were they in conversation. Leone found Bessie, the lieutenant's wife, an excellent companion, and they became firm friends from the first. Bessie was intelligent and affable, but it was apparent that in marrying Lieutenant Audley she had made a sad mistake, for she did not love him.

As soon as they were aware that day had dawned, Deadwood Dick rose and replaced his mask, which he had removed while in the presence of Leone.

"Will you remain with us long, Calamity?" the chief asked, as he was about to quit the cabin.

"Till to-night, I reckon," replied the Dare-devil, "for I don't want to expose you, by slidin' off in daylight. Who knows but Denby may have spies in the canyon, who'd string me up at sight for bein' among you?"

"You are right. Make yourself at home as long as you choose to stay, for you are welcome."

He then quitted the cabin. Bessie followed, and Leone, Calamity and Donald were left alone.

Deadwood Dick's men were well disciplined, and when they were drawn up in line before him an hour later, they looked every inch the bold, fearless men they were. All were unmasked now, and a strange variety of faces was presented to view. All were young men, so far as years went, none being over thirty; but the faces of many might have told a different story to a stranger.

Calamity Jane and Donald were present, having left Leone, with Bessie, at the cabin.

The road-agents all seemed to be much surprised to be called thus to order, under the piercing, stern gaze of their young leader, and were perhaps more astonished when he addressed them.

"Fellows!" he said, in the cool, measured tones that oftentimes rather repelled than attracted, after he had run his keen, observing eye over the band, "we have a little matter before us that needs consideration; a matter that involves the peace and security of us all.

"Among you there is a *traitor* to our cause—a faithless wretch, who, for a few dollars of offered reward, has betrayed us to our enemies."

A murmur of surprise ran from one end of the line to the other. Deadwood Dick continued:

"I hate to suspect any of you, my boys, for you have all sworn by me and served my interest faithfully. But I ask you, is it not right that we should investigate the case, and discover, if possible, the traitor, that we may punish him?"

"Certainly! of course!" were the cries given in hearty unison.

Deadwood Dick's face flushed with pride. He loved his men with his whole heart, and it pleased him to see them so eager to punish treachery.

"Good; well said, my hearties. And now whom shall I suspect? Of you all, only one man would I care to dishonour by suspicion, and even he may be innocent—God knows I hope he is. That man is——"

"Carlos Cambre!" spoke Calamity Jane; for she saw that Dick hated to make the accusation.

In an instant, all eyes were turned upon the young man, who was a Spaniard, for if he was the traitor they wished to see the effect of the accusation.

But only astonishment and indignation were depicted upon the clear face of the suspected man at the charge. He was a fine-looking fellow of about five-and-twenty, and there was nothing in his face to excite doubt as to his loyalty and honesty. Yet upon him had rested the chief's suspicion.

"You wrong me, captain," Cambre said, huskily, when he had recovered from the first shock. "Have I not served you as faithfully as the rest? To be sure, I have only been a brother two months, but as God is my judge, I have never been guilty of treachery."

"You have several times appeared loth to obey my commands, sir."

"Probably; but that was owing to my wild, ungovernable spirit, which at times struggles hard for the mastery."

"Exactly; and that same spirit has made you a traitor to our cause!"

"No, captain; by High Heaven, I swear that I am *not* the guilty one!"

"I would like to believe you innocent, Carlos," and Deadwood Dick's stern glance softened a trifle; "but the laws of our order demand that I should find this traitor, even though I have to kill you all to accomplish the work. Therefore, believing in God that I am just, I denounce you as a *traitor*! Fellow road-agents, what is the penalty?"

There was a short silence, during which many kindly and pitying glances were turned upon Carlos Cambre. Then, in one voice came the answer, grim and terrible in its full realization:

"DEATH!"

As the knell of his doom fell upon his hearing, the young Spaniard bowed his head upon his breast, and tears trickled down over his cheeks. Hardly a road-agent was there but was deeply moved; but the order of their chief aroused them:

"*Death!* that is the measure usually meted out to traitors!" he said, glancing down the line. "Carlos Cambre, you are then sentenced to death. Boys, bind him to the sapling on yonder edge of the plateau; bring me five loaded and five unloaded rifles, and we will have the terrible work over!"

Reluctantly the road-agents seized their brother outlaw, but he begged for one moment's respite. The poor fellow, when released, walked over to where Deadwood

Dick stood, and threw his arms about the young chief's neck and embraced him.

"Good-bye, captain," he said, huskily, "good-bye! I am content to die for you, whom I have loved as a brother. You are judging me wrongly, for you had no truer man among your band. Good-bye, and may your Christian God bless you."

Then he conquered his agitation, went back and surrendered himself into the hands of his brother outlaws.

"Is it possible your heart is of stone?" said a low, sweet voice, and turning about, Deadwood Dick found Leone, accompanied by Bessie, the lieutenant's wife, standing a few steps away.

"No!" he cried, his voice ringing out clearly. "Deadwood Dick still has a heart, for all it has been repeatedly trampled upon. Men, Carlos Cambre is no traitor, and I command you to release him."

A great shout of rejoicing then went up, for none was there among the assembled band who could force themselves to believe in the guilt of the accused.

The chief went straight to Cambre and grasped his hands.

"Forgive me, mate!" he said, huskily, "for my unjust suspicion. I apologize, and will try to do more for you, in time, for I am satisfied you are worthy. Have I your forgiveness, old boy?"

"Certainly," replied the true-hearted Spaniard. "I should have forgiven you even had I been shot by your orders."

The men were then dismissed, and Leone and Bessie, accompanied by Dick, Donald and Calamity Jane, adjourned to the cabin.

An hour later, four persons, well mounted, were riding down the canyon toward Deadwood. Three were acquaintances of ours—Donald Yates, Leone, and Bessie; the fourth was a rough-looking old fellow, with shaggy hair and beard, dressed in dirty mining-garb; and not one out of a hundred would have even suspected that under this disguise was the terror of the gold country—Deadwood Dick.

The quartette rode into the Magic City about noon, and pushed rapidly up the crowded main street toward the cottage of McKenzie. Leone was shielded as much as possible among the others, lest some of her enemies, on the watch, should discover her.

But, despite their precaution, a woman looking out of an upper window of the Metropolitan saloon, saw and recognized her!

It was the mysterious veiled Card Queen.

And as they passed the saloon, Deadwood Dick also made a discovery.

Standing on the front steps, in earnest conversation with Uriah Denby, the Regulator chief, was *Lieutenant Audley*!

At almost the same instant, the lieutenant discovered and pointed out Dick's party to Denby; then the two exchanged a few hurried words, and whirling abruptly, entered the saloon.

What did it mean?

Was Lieutenant Audley the traitor?

CHAPTER XIII

CALLERS

"COME! let's hurry up!" said the Road Prince, uneasily, as he spurred his horse into a gallop, "for I'm sure there's fun ahead."

"What do you mean?" asked Bessie, who had also seen her husband in company with the chief Regulator. "What did you see to alarm you?"

"Nothing to alarm me; but enough to make me know it's unhealthy in this immediate vicinity for a certain chap who sails under the title of Deadwood Dick. Did you see Fred Audley back there?"

"Yes, I saw him. Do you think he recognized you in your disguise?"

"Certainly. That was Uriah Denby, the new Regulator leader, with him; and Audley pointed me out and told who I was. *He is the traitor!*"

Hard lines came into view about Bessie's mouth, but she did not seem shocked.

"I was fearful that such was the case," she said, pain and mortification supplanting any tender feeling she may have had for the man. "But I had no evidence against him. He would have killed you long ago, had he felt sure that the men would accept him as a chief."

Deadwood Dick frowned, but said no more until they had halted in front of one of a row of recently finished shanties or "cottages" as they were called, though sad-looking cottages were they.

Here he dismounted, and rapped upon a door, at the same time bidding the others dismount, which they did.

Presently the door opened and a young, pretty-faced woman stood upon the threshold. A glance, and we recognize her by her features as the sister of young Harris, or Deadwood Dick.

"Good-morning!" said the disguised

road-agent, bowing low. "Do I behold Anita, the sister of our good chief, Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes, I am his sister. Why do you ask?" questioned Anita.

"Because I have been commissioned to bring here for you to care for and protect, these two young women and this gentleman. Your brother feels sure you will not refuse to take them in."

"But, sir, my brother is——"

"Alive and well, dear lady, though all Deadwood believes him dead. It was not he who was lynched by Dashing Dave, but another, Gerald Hawk, by name, who was a brother to this young lady, Miss Leone. May I leave my party in your charge?"

"Certainly; and God be praised that Dick still lives!" cried Anita, crying for joy. "There is a stable in the rear for your horses; leave them here, and I will send a boy to care for them. Come right into the house, ladies and gentlemen, and make yourselves at home."

"I must return to the mountains," said Dick. "Miss Hawk, may I speak with you one moment?"

Bessie and Donald accompanied Anita into the cottage; Leone lingered a moment behind, during which time the young chief of the road-agents made bold to take her hand, while he gazed at her lovingly.

"Leone—Miss Hawk," he said, earnestly, "duty calls me back to my men, and I leave you here, because I think it safest. Ere long there is destined to be spilt in these Black Hills, *blood*—blood of the innocent as well as the criminal. I have warned people to let me alone; if they do not heed my warning their deaths be on their own heads. In the conflict I may fall, for my lease of life is not for ever, I suppose; but if I do, I want you to know of my passionate love for you. You must have been aware of it from the first, for you are not one of the blind. You know just what I am; I know nothing of your past—only that I love you more than any other woman. Therefore, I ask you, if I come to you after I have settled accounts with these Regulators, will you make me a happy man?"

"Wait till you come back," she replied, evading a direct answer. "I will tell you then."

"Thanks, dear young lady; I will consider that as good as a promise, and seal our betrothal thus."

And before she could prevent him, he had slipped a magnificent cluster diamond ring of exceeding value upon the forefinger of her left hand, caught her to his breast and im-

printed a kiss upon her rosy lips, and then vaulted into the saddle of his waiting horse. In a moment more he was off.

Leone watched him, with a half-sorrowful, half-pleased look in her dreamy eyes, until he was hidden from view; then, with her heart pulsating almost wildly in the joy of a new-born love, she turned and entered the cottage, where the others had preceded her a few minutes before.

Straight up through the homely main street of the homelier metropolis cantered Deadwood Dick, until he came to the Metropolitan saloon, when he guided his horse into the side of the street, leaped out of the saddle, and ascended the steps that led into the saloon. As he was about to enter, Lieutenant Audley and Uriah Denby, the Regulator, came out.

"Hello!" exclaimed Audley, with an oath, his flushed face showing that he had been drinking rather freely, "here's the very cuss we want now!"

"Waal, ef I'm ther indywidual ye refer ter," drawled the disguised road-agent, resting his hands upon his hips, his arms akimbo, and his eyes squinted in a laughable manner—"ef I'm the roarin' rinosserhoss ye indy-cate, w'at might be your business?"

"We'll very soon show you!" avowed Audley. "You can't shut my eye up wi' your blarney. You're *our* game, and you're *Deadwood Dick*!"

"WHAT!" Apparently the rough-looking customer was astonished. "What'd ye say, boyee? *Me* Deadwood Dick! *Me* the great road-feller, who has got more brass'n a hull Missouri brass band? Durn my old eyes ef it ain't the worst I've heerd since Jonah swallowed a whale, bone and all!"

"See here!" said Denby, authoritatively, "you may as well surrender, Harris. We've got you this time, without any mistake; so the quicker you give yourself up peaceably, the better it will——"

The Regulator never finished the sentence, for like a sledge-hammer Deadwood Dick's fist hit him between the eyes, and he went hind-foremost down the steps into the street, where he lay like a log, helpless and insensible.

A tremendous kick from the road-agent's boot, in the stomach, stretched Audley out, quietly; then, when a hundred pair of eyes were on him, Deadwood Dick dashed down the steps, and with his gleaming knife deliberately slashed upon the Regulator's forehead the terrible sign of *double-daggers*! An instant more, and he was on the back of his horse, and up the street at breakneck speed flew the horse and rider, that wild laugh

echoing back upon the hearing of an excited and astonished population.

Uriah Denby, the Regulator, was not killed. The terrible blow only stunned him for a time; the gashed forehead was the only important injury. The wound was skilfully dressed by a surgeon, but it would leave a scar of double-daggers never to be obliterated from the living flesh: the chief was a marked man for life.

The *Pioneer* issued an extra next morning, giving a detailed account of the whole affair. It gave its opinion of Deadwood Dick in terms more forcible than polite, and hoped no efforts would be spared to capture this most notorious criminal of the nineteenth century.

In Mrs. Anita McKenzie Leone and Bessie found one of the sweetest little women they had ever encountered.

Her life thus far with Justin McKenzie had been one of perpetual happiness and marital bliss, and not a cloud had come across the horizon of their existence until the hanging of the supposed Prince of the Road a short time before.

"And it seems so strange," she said, "that instead of my brother, it should be yours, Leone. It is the change of sadness to your heart and joy to mine, for I cannot help but rejoice that dear Ned is safe and alive."

And Leone secretly rejoiced in the same knowledge, for her heart now beat faster when she thought of the dashing road-agent, or glanced at his costly token upon her engagement finger.

About dark there was a loud, rude knock at the door, and Anita, accompanied by Donald, went to answer the summons, Leone and Bessie Audley crouching out of sight behind a great cupboard.

On opening the door, two men were found to be standing on the steps outside.

They were none other than Leone's step-father, Jasper Leslie, and her persecuting lover, Curtis Sydnor.

"Good-evenin'," saluted Leslie, while both men doffed their hats. "We called to see a young lady whom you have in your charge, Miss Leone Hawk, by name. We presume she is at liberty."

"No!" said Donald, coolly, "she is not. I do not believe she cares to see you."

"No, probably not," sneered Sydnor, sarcastically, "but that makes no difference to us. We have a little important business to transact with her, and must and shall see her!"

"But you won't, though!" declared

Donald. "You will have to wait till you see her outside this door, I'm thinking."

"But I say we shall do nothing of the kind, you insolent puppy!" roared Leslie, flying into a passion. "Take yourself out of the road, and let us pass!"

"I will not," retorted the cool miner, perfectly calm. "If you try to enter here you'll be apt to stop several bullets." And in his hand, as if to back his assertion, he held a small gold-mounted revolver.

Sydnor swore and so did Leslie.

"I would advise you to make yourself scarce," continued Yates, pulling back the hammer. "My argument of a case is always sharp and decisive, and composed of round, leaden pellets. Come! will you move away, or shall I ventilate you?"

"You have the advantage now, curse you!" growled Sydnor, retreating down the steps, his face nearly purple with rage, "but your triumph will be short-lived. I'll have that girl if I have to murder every cursed dog in Deadwood. Do you hear, you young wretch?"

"Ay! ay!" responded Yates, "I am not deaf. If you propose paying us another visit, we will be prepared for you."

Then he closed and locked the door, and the discomfited villains turned their steps back toward the Metropolitan.

Leone had been considerably alarmed, when she heard the voices of her enemies, but she became once more her lively self when she found that they had gone.

A few moments later there were two raps upon the door, and by peering through a crack in the window-shutters, Anita was able to distinguish two persons standing on the steps.

Donald went to the door. One of the twain was Lieutenant Audley—the other was Ida Burton, the Veiled Queen.

"Well?" demanded the miner; "what's wanted?"

"I want my wife!" cried Audley, with a frightful oath; "so bounce her out here!"

"And I," said the Veiled Queen, bowing, "have come for my daughter, Leone! Tell her her mother is here!"

CHAPTER XIV

CARRIED OFF

DONALD closed the door, and reported to the parties concerned, who were anxiously waiting.

"My mother!" cried Leone, in great astonishment when she learned what was

the veiled woman's mission. "What can it mean? My mother was accidentally drowned in the Missouri river, years ago."

"Are you sure? There may have been some mistake."

"Ah! would to God it could be so. My stepfather was my authority on the matter."

"Then, doubtless he lied to you; for if that was him at the door, a while ago, he is not too mean for anything. Shall I admit the woman?"

"Yes. I can at least see her."

"And how about your husband, Mrs. Audley? Do you wish to see him?"

"No!" the young woman replied, scornfully. "I despise him!"

"Then I shall not bring him in?"

"No. Send him away if you can."

The miner went back and opened the door, a cocked revolver in his hand.

"You may enter, madam," he said, addressing the Card Queen, "and you, sir," to the half-intoxicated lieutenant, "can get out of the reach of my revolver in ten seconds, or take the consequences. Come! get a-goin'. One! two——"

With a curse the baffled renegade retreated down the steps, and thence down the street.

"You are a capital hand to rid yourself of nuisances!" laughed the Veiled Queen, merrily, as she followed the miner inside. "I saw you drive away Jasper Leslie and his companion a short time ago."

They entered the little front parlour, where Leone, Bessie, and Anita were waiting.

"My child—my own darling child!" cried the veiled woman, uncovering her face and advancing with outstretched arms. Leone gave her one quick, searching glance, and then sprang into her embrace with a glad, joyous cry.

"My mother! my mother!" cried the girl, joyfully; "I believe you are she."

"Then you believe truly, my child, for I am your mother, whom you have not seen for years. At last, after many trials and much terrible suffering, I rejoice, for I have found one of my own blood to love and cherish."

And the two wept tears of grateful joy upon each other's shoulders.

After the first fond greeting was over, conversation took a turn upon another subject. Leone spoke of Jasper Leslie and Sydnor's threat to possess her, at no matter what cost.

"The villains shall never lay a hand upon you, dear!" the Card Queen said, reassuringly. "I have the power to arrest them both, and once they know who I am, they will not offer to molest you further."

But this was a mistake. After supper had been partaken of and all were seated comfortably in the little front parlour, loud shouts were heard from out in the wild wet night, and peering out of the window Donald beheld a score of rough-looking fellows coming up the street.

They were headed by the two villains, Sydnor and Leslie, and many were armed with long poles and torches.

"They're coming!" exclaimed the miner, setting his teeth together with an ominous click. "We must repulse them or surrender—which?"

"We'll fight, of course!" cried Leone's new-found mother, fiercely. "I have two perforating instruments here"—and she displayed a couple of handsome revolvers—"with which I can do good service. Death to Jasper Leslie, I say, and then the same to his tools!"

In two hours Deadwood Dick was back at his mountain stronghold. Here he found Calamity Jane and his band as he had left them, enjoying a good rest preparatory to the great siege that they expected was soon to come.

"I am glad you have got back," Calamity said; "for that takes a burden from my shoulders. I like well enough to boss my own ranch, but when it comes to bossing somebody else's, I ain't nowhar."

Just then a pigeon, circling around in the air overhead, attracted Deadwood Dick's attention.

"Look! it's a messenger from my reporter at the Metropolitan. What news can it bring, I wonder?"

He was soon answered. After describing many graceful curves and circles, the beautiful bird slowly descended and alighted upon the chief's shoulder. It was of snowy white colour, and under its left wing was tied a small piece of folded white paper.

Detaching this, Deadwood Dick glanced over it.

"Phew!" he muttered, setting his teeth together firmly. Then he handed the message to Calamity, while he strode rapidly off toward the larger cabin.

There were but few words of it:

"Come; you're needed. Gang o' toughs goin' to 'tack McKenzie's; Denby also started after you with fifty men. Look out.
PETE."

In a very few moments Deadwood Dick and his men had left their mountain retreat,

and were dashing through the intricacies of the mountain on their way to Deadwood.

On came the gang of men toward the cottage, their hoarse yells and shouts of laughter calculated to inspire the hearer with dread and terror. They were mainly composed of the class of bummers and bruisers that hover about all mining towns, and pick up a living by the strength of their muscle, or lightness of their fingers.

One of the grisly crowd, a very giant in size, by the way, was yelling and gesticulating, evidently trying to attract the attention of those inside.

"Hello! what do you want?" cried Donald, through an open slat in the shutter.

"Cum out hayer, durn yer old socks—cum out an' see," replied the giant. "Yer a drat-hanged coward, ye be, or ye wouldn't be afeared tew show up. Ar' ye cummin' out, or shall we cum in?"

"Maybe ye'd better come in!" was the decision of the miner, "that is, if you've any desire to stop a small cannonade of round lead. If you haven't, you'd better get back to your respective ranches, take my word for it. I'll give you and your crowd four minutes by the watch to get out of pistol-range. All that are wise will not neglect to skin out."

"Nary a budge will we!" shouted back McGinness.

Then for a moment silence ensued.

"Shall we fire upon them?" asked Bessie, peering out of a knot-hole. "I could just salt that big chap nicely from here."

"No. We will not open on them till they make some show of violence, then blaze away, and make every bullet count."

"Listen!" cried Anita, in alarm. "Some one is pounding at the back door."

"You keep watch in front, and I'll go and see who it is," replied Donald, and off he went, revolver in hand.

The back door opened into an entry or back porch, and the person knocking was evidently in this.

"Hello!" said the miner, sternly. "Who's out there, and what do you want?"

"Hist!" came back the reply, in a shrill whisper, through the keyhole. "Don't attract attention here, but let me in."

"The deuce I will. What'll I do that for? Who's out there, and what do you want?"

"Sh! you'll have them toughs around here if you don't shut up. Let me in. I come from Deadwood Dick to help you. He and more of the boys will be along soon. Come! let me in, if you're goin' to."

Yates had a cool head on him and never did things in a rush. Therefore he did not immediately open the door, but searched around and found a knot-hole, through which to obtain a glimpse of the gent outside. At last he was successful, and though the gloom was dense, he was able to distinguish a man, brawny and heavy set, attired in mountaineer costume, and masked. In all probability he was a genuine road-agent.

"S'posin' you tell us your name!" proposed Donald, as he opened the door.

"Certainly," assented the man, entering hurriedly. "It is Kirk Graves; but listen! the toughs have attacked the shanty. Lead the way front, and we'll give them a blizzard. I hope the captain will hurry along with the rest o' the gang; he'll soon scatter this yelling crowd!"

Without another word Donald did as directed, for he heard the ruffians attacking the front door with poles and clubs. He had taken the precaution to bar it, strongly, however, and it stood the fierce assault without flinching. The ladies were somewhat alarmed to see a stranger in their midst, but Donald speedily dispelled any doubt they may have had.

"Tis a member of Deadwood Dick's band," he explained, "come to help us keep off the devils till Dick can put in an appearance in person."

"And here goes for a shot!" cried Graves, firing through a knot-hole into the crowd. "Bully. I dropped one gallus tough first shot."

Suddenly, Leone, who was occupied in watching the others fire, saw Graves reel away from his loop-hole, and stagger across the room, blood oozing from a wound in his forehead.

"Take me where I can get water," he said, reaching out blindly. "Don't tell the rest I'm wounded."

Quickly Leone seized him by the arm and led him out through the kitchen into the back porch, where there was a driven well. Pumping some fresh water, she was about to turn to bathe the road-agent's forehead, when she was suddenly seized in a stout pair of arms, a shawl thrown over her head to prevent any screams from her lips; then she felt herself being borne rapidly away. She struggled, but could not break from the iron grasp that held her; she screamed for assistance, but the cloak effectually muffled her cries. She was powerless; and in the hands of her enemies, who were taking her—where?

Ah! that she knew!

But it was impossible to form any idea:

she knew nothing only that she was being carried on—on—on!

CHAPTER XV

DEADWOOD DICK TAKES A HAND

THE absence of Leone was not noticed, nor that of the pretended road-agent, until later, so busy were the others engaged in loading and firing.

One by one the attacking ruffians fell—some dead, others more or less injured. At last their number became so diminished that they turned and made a dash toward Deadwood. But in this they were baffled.

As if waiting the moment, madly down through the pouring street of the rain-soaked town, dashed a cavalcade of horsemen, headed by a grim black rider, as black as the wild wet night itself; madly on they rode, and then came a collision with the retreating ruffians; groans and furious curses, the bang! bang! of revolvers, the clash of steel, and high above the roar of the pelting storm, rings out a wild shriek of laughter, followed by a mighty shout from o'er a score of powerful throats:

"Hurrah! three cheers for Deadwood Dick! Vengeance and double-daggers!"

The battle between the ruffians and road-agents is of but short duration, and soon Deadwood Dick and his men dash up to the cottage, to learn the damage done there. But only the young chief dismounts and is admitted; the rest sweep on and off into the dense shadows. Deadwood Dick was admitted into the cottage without delay.

"You are welcome!" cried Donald, grasping the Prince's hand. "You came, however, just when we were successful in driving off the enemy."

"Yes, so I perceived. But I could not get here any sooner."

"You were soon enough to finish what we left, I imagine, by the sounds of conflict. Your man, Graves, said you were coming. By the way, Bessie, where is the fellow?"

"I don't know. I've been paying more attention to my shooting than anything else."

"It's deuced dark, seems to me. Get a light, Mrs. McKenzie. Maybe the man's been shot down and we knew nothing about it."

"What did you say about my man Graves?" demanded Dick. "I've no one in my crowd of that name. I'll wager a thousand the chap was an impostor, and you have been fooled!" cried Dick, his tone

betraying alarm. "Where is Leone? Quick, Anita—the light!"

"Leone! Leone!" cried the Card Queen. The lamp was seized, and its rays flashed around the room.

"Yes, by Heaven! she is gone!" Dick exclaimed. "You're all a pack of idiots! You've let her enemies snatch her right from under your noses!"

A cry of horror went up from all.

"And that pretended road-agent is the abductor of my child!" cried Mrs. Hawk, or, as we have known her, the Card Queen. "No doubt the man was Curtis Sydnor."

"But Sydnor had side-whiskers, where this fellow had none," said Donald.

"The shears would rid him of his beard," Dick vouchsafed, pacing up and down the floor, excitedly. "It was no doubt one of the young lady's enemies. But, there's no use of crying over spilt milk. She's gone, and that's the long and short of it."

"And we must find her!" decided Donald, grimly. "We must begin the search now, and not give it over until we have her again in our possession."

"Which is easier said than done!" replied the Prince of the Road.

"Her captors will not be apt to remain long in Deadwood with her," said Mrs. Hawk, thoughtfully. "They will most likely take the morning stage for Cheyenne, *en route* for Texas."

"In that case, I think I can safely promise you the restoration of your child," said Deadwood Dick, reassuringly. "The out-stage will carry a large consignment of gold, and by stopping it, I can doubtless hit two birds with one stone. So I will now bid you adieu. You probably will have no more trouble, as the young lady was the cause of what we have had. Without doubt, your plan, madam, is the one Leone's enemies will adopt: so I will see to it that the stage is stopped, and if we find your daughter she shall be safely returned to you. Good-evening!"

And the next moment the door had closed behind Deadwood Dick.

Outside, in the wild, pouring night, he mounted his black charger, who was growing impatient at the delay, and down through the gulch dashed the rider at breakneck speed, and no one was abroad to check his course.

In the meantime, where was Leone?

The Metropolitan was an hotel, in addition to its saloon and dance-house, and in an upper room two men sat at a common deal table, upon which a lamp was burning. The room was bare and cheerless, its only furni-

ture being the table and two chairs occupied by the two men, and a low, uninviting bed in a further corner, upon which lay a young woman, apparently in deep sleep.

The men in question were Curtis Sydnor and Leone's stepfather, Jasper Leslie. Sydnor was still attired in the disguise in which he had visited the McKenzie cottage, all except the mask, which lay before him on the table. He had sheared off his beard and looked rough and gristly.

"The plan worked capital!" he was saying, bringing his hand down on the table heavily.

"And you'd never thought of such a thing if I hadn't told ye!" growled Leslie.

"Bah! you needn't brag, you old bone-yard. I've got the gal, and that's all I care. You can go to thunder, now, if you like."

"Not till you give me over the mortgage," replied Leslie, firmly.

"Will you wait till you get it?" sneered the other evilly, triumph gleaming in the glance of his blood-shot eye. "I rather reckon you will. I've got the gal, and you didn't help to get her, either; and I've got the mortgage, too——"

"You lie, Curtis Sydnor!" cried Leone, sitting up on the bed. "When you were carrying me away from my friends, I worked my hand into the inside pocket of your hunting-shirt, and abstracted a packet of papers——"

"By heaven, girl, the mortgage was among the papers."

"So I thought at the time, and, unbeknown to you, I tore the whole lot all into little bits, and sent them off on the wind. Ha! ha! ha!"

For a moment the baffled schemer looked like an infuriated wild beast, in his rage.

"You wretch! You cursed little imp of the devil!" he roared, drawing a knife from his belt. "I've half a notion to cut your throat from ear to ear."

"Go ahead and cut, if you want to!" retorted Leone, defiantly. "But it won't help matters a bit. The mortgage is gone, and you cannot get the Hawk property; it is mine, and no earthly power can take it away from me, for my mother is alive, and will help me to fight you."

"Bah! your mother made food for fishes in the bottom of the Missouri, years ago!" sneered Sydnor. "After you marry me the property is mine, no matter if you have a dozen mothers living."

"But I won't marry you, you insolent vagabond," retorted the girl, firmly.

Swiftly down through the black mountain

canyons tore the noisy Cheyenne stage, with its plunging, snorting horses, six in number, and the swearing Jehu, who managed the lines with one hand, and the incessantly cracking whip with the other. It is an hour before day-dawn, and in the black, wooded mountains is the very darkest part of night.

The Jehu is a veteran on the Deadwood trail, and no other than Bill McGucken, who probably has hauled more humans into the Black Hills metropolis than any other "howler" on the road.

And Bill knows his business, too, as has formerly been evidenced.

On—on tears the jolting, overloaded coach; on—on plunge the fierce, spirited horses; then, in a darkest part of a dark, deep gulch, McGucken reins in his "prancers," and yells down into the stage:

"All you't's got any tin may's well be gittin' it out, fer we've arriv' at Deadwood Dick's toll-gate. Yander's his gang now, comin' through the pass!"

True enough, Deadwood Dick and his men came riding leisurely into view, revolvers drawn in hand.

McGucken had been long enough "stagin' it" to know what their coming meant.

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

STRAIGHT on came the road-agents, fearlessly and boldly, until they had surrounded the stage.

McGucken was down upon his knees on his box, his hands clasped in mute supplication, for the poor fool really believed he was in the presence of the spirit of Deadwood Dick. The passengers in the coach did not offer to fire upon the enemy, for they well knew that such a proceeding would insure their own death.

"Get up, you crazy loon!" cried Deadwood Dick, riding to the front of the coach and giving McGucken a crack alongside the ear with the butt of the stage whip. "What in the Old Nick is the matter with you?"

William arose, forthwith, fully satisfied that there was more that was earthly than spiritual of the one who had given him the blow.

"Yes, yer honour," he said, trembling, as he beheld the stern gaze of the young chief centred upon him. "I heer ye say et."

"Correct. You're generally a pretty fair sort o' pilgrim, Billiam, and I can't afford to be hard on ye. How much tin have you got on board?"

"Nary, capten, unless et be in the treasure-box, an' I couldn't say the amount ye'll find there."

"Well, we'll proceed to investigate. Boys, blow open the shell, half a dozen of you, while I attend to taking up a collection for the foreign missions!"

Then the Prince rode back to the coach door and opened it.

"Gentlemen," he said, politely, "I would request that you step outside of the stage. Upon the impulse of the moment, I have decided not to relieve you of your valuables. I will guarantee that none of your effects will suffer."

At this unusual proposal there was a general scramble to get out, and as one by one the passengers emerged through the low doorway, Deadwood Dick scanned them narrowly, by aid of a lighted torch held in the hand of Lieutenant Cambre.

At last they were evidently all out, a dozen of them all told, for the most part miners who were bidding adieu to the Magic City.

"Are all outside, gentlemen?"

"No! thar's a young gal in thar's bin drunk ever since we started!" vouchsafed one old fellow, "and those here pilgrims, sur," pointing to two of the passengers, who were attired in citizen's dress, "ar' the ones as fetched her inter ther stage."

"Then they are our game. Seize 'em, mates!" cried Dick, covering the two wretches with his revolvers.

"A couple of you bring the young lady out of the coach. She is not drunk, but has been drugged by these two scheming demons."

Sydnor and Leslie, for it was the two enemies of Leone, were seized and securely bound; then Leone was brought from the inside of the coach and laid on the grass, beside the stage-track. She was in a deathly stupor, that might easily have been mistaken for an intoxicated sleep.

Deadwood Dick dismounted and knelt by her side. He saw that she would soon wear off the effects of the opiate if left in the open air. It was still raining briskly, so he covered her body with his blanket, and let the rain fall upon her upturned face. While he was thus engaged, there were three pistol-shots in rapid succession, and the audible sound of as many bodies falling upon the ground.

Springing to his feet, he perceived at a glance that the villains Sydnor and Leslie had been shot; also, one of the passengers lay outstretched upon the greensward, with blood oozing from the left temple, and a

smoking revolver clutched in the stiffening fingers, to show the origin of the bloody tragedy.

Furthermore, he recognized in that passenger no less a person than our heroine's mother, the Veiled Queen, whom he had seen at the cottage, and also many previous times at the "Met."

"Great heaven! this is a horrible thing, gentlemen. Have any of you passengers any knowledge of this trio?" asked Dick, bending over the dead woman—for she was dead, the last bullet from her revolver having crashed through her brain. The false whiskers she wore had partly fallen off, and her long hair was disarranged.

"Reckon not!" replied the miner, who had spoken before. "They all got inter the stage at Deadwood, and that's all we know."

"Well, so be it. All three are dead, and thank God I have not their blood upon my hands. I shall bury them, here, and that is all I can do. Mates, have you done with the treasure-box?"

"Ay! ay! We've cleaned it out."

"Very good. You passengers may now enter and the stage can proceed. But, mind you, Bill McGucken, not a word of this to the Cheyenne or Deadwood authorities!"

A general scramble was made for the coach, by the overjoyed passengers, and in a moment it was rolling noisily away through the gulch.

"We must be moving," said the Prince, glancing at Leone who had not yet returned to consciousness. "Day is almost upon us, and it is not desirable to be visible too much, being as the Regulators are abroad."

"Then shall we return to the stronghold?" asked Lieutenant Cambre.

"No, Denby and his men are likely up in that region, and I don't wish to meet them, if it can be avoided."

"Well said, captain, for surely enough blood has been spilt by us to ensure us a warm reception into the devil's kingdom. Where, then, shall we go?"

"To the place Calamity Jane calls Golden Bar. She directed me so I can easily find it, and there we can lie low for a time."

Accordingly the road-agents all mounted, and Leone was handed tenderly into the arms of Deadwood Dick, after which the cavalcade rode away from the fatal spot. Under the young chief's lead, they threaded the intricate mountain gorges, and hours later, when the warm sunlight was flooding the earth with a beautiful radiance, they reached the novel entrance to Golden Bar, and rode, single file, into the cavern.

Calamity was there, evidently awaiting

their coming, and bade all make themselves at home and guests of her hospitality.

Richard explained in a very few words, and then Leone was laid upon the couch of blankets, while Calamity set about applying restoratives. But her efforts were unavailing.

"It's mighty strange," Calamity said, grimly, her eyes staring. "I never saw chloroform or ether hang on like this. I am afraid that——"

She paused, in evident hesitation.

"What!—afraid of what?" cried the road-agent, in alarm.

"Afraid that the wretches, finding that there was no hopes o' carryin' her off, have *poisoned her*."

"Great Heaven! girl, you cannot be in earnest. *She* poisoned!" Richard knelt down beside the senseless idol of his heart, pale and wild-eyed.

"It may not be so," replied Calamity, "but it's more'n likely. The cusses war bound to have the gal for some purpose or other; I reckon it was on account o' property. They were not too good to do any thing. Maybe she'll rouse up, but I wouldn't swear to it. At any rate, an hour will tell, for if it's poison, she'll die inside o' that!"

Tears fell thick and fast from the eyes of Deadwood Dick.

"I think you have little need to weep, Captain Dick," said Cambre, the lieutenant, kneeling on the opposite side of the sleeping beauty. "If it is only the effects of chloroform or ether, it will undoubtedly wear off, for it rarely kills a person of robust build and health."

"I am well satisfied et's p'izen," said Calamity, confidently.

"Well, in that case, I believe I can fetch her around. Wait till I return," replied Cambre, and turning, he hurried from the cavern. In ten minutes he came back, with a handful of reddish weeds, that the Sioux Indians call *cabrai*—meaning "the fire-plant."

Procuring a kettle from Calamity, he proceeded to steep the herbs into a strong, unpleasant-smelling liquor, a glassful of which was forced down the maiden's throat. In ten minutes more she had vomited up the emetic, and with it came a greenish sediment that was in the first stages of fermentation.

"She *was* poisoned, true enough," the lieutenant said, "but she will now recover, I'll guarantee."

"And I owe you another debt of gratitude!" cried Deadwood Dick, grasping his hand warmly. "May God reward you in a way I cannot."

Leone now rapidly showed signs of returning consciousness, and inside of an hour she was sitting up, fully aroused, with a clear comprehension of what was going on about her.

At her lover's request she related what had transpired from the time she was stolen from the cottage by Sydnor, until they had forcibly drugged her in the room at the Metropolitan saloon, preparatory to taking her aboard the stage.

Dick then explained to her all about how he had rescued her from the stage; how her mother, disguised as a passenger, had killed Sydnor and Leslie, and then herself; and how they were given a decent burial on the spot whereon they died.

The day passed very quickly away, and before any one was scarcely aware of the fact, the shades of night came creeping into the cavern.

While Calamity Jane was roasting a huge piece of venison for the evening meal, and the road-agents were in another portion of the Golden Bar, caring for the horses, Deadwood Dick called Leone one side. He was not wearing his mask and looked really handsome, despite the sombreness of his attire.

"Leone—Miss Hawk," he said, taking her hand in his, "I am ready now to receive your answer. I see you still wear my ring on the finger where I placed it, and this makes me hope that you have concluded to become my bride."

The young woman was silent for a moment, apparently considering. At last she looked up, her eyes meeting his searchingly.

"Dick—for I want to call you that—I do not know what answer to make. The death of my mother has left me without a relative that I know of—alone in the world. I will be frank with you, and say that I love you, but when it comes to marrying you, there is the question: Shall I or shall I not?"

"If you love me, darling—and I surely do love you—why let any question of the kind arise? We can be supremely happy together, and is that not enough? I own a gold claim at Crook City which this year will realize me ten thousand dollars. This is my *own*."

"I would not care for poverty so long as I love you," she replied, nestling in the clasp of his strong arms, and allowing his lips to meet hers in a passionate, loving kiss. "But, you are an outlaw—a man for ever doomed to be hunted from place to place by the minions of justice. We should never know a moment's peace together."

"Pshaw! you take a wrong-sided view

of the matter," said the young Prince, kissing her again.

"Have no fear but what we shall be happy and live in comfort and luxury. I shall not always cling to the road; already the day is dawning when the Black Hills gold excitement shall sink into that semi-oblivion that you will find in the mining districts of Colorado and California. Then shall the world know Deadwood Dick no more, and Edward Harris will quit the West for his old Eastern home where he has yet a fair record and can start in life anew."

"And not till then?"

"Not till then, dearest."

"Then I would rather not marry you."

"You don't love me!"

"Oh! yes, I do; but——"

"But rather than marry a road-agent you would sacrifice your love?"

"No, Dick; I *will* marry you, no matter how much I may be in the wrong. I hope we shall neither of us ever regret it."

"I am sure we will not, darling. This very night I will go to Deadwood for a preacher, to join us in the bonds of wedlock. I shall also bring along my sister and Audley's wife to be with you. Is this agreeable, sweetest?"

"It is, Dick, and I am so happy," murmured the blushing girl. "It seems that there is no other power so divinely exquisite as love."

After lingering a while longer, and exchanging vows of eternal love and constancy, the happy pair returned to where Calamity already had the roast supper in waiting. It was a tempting, juicy haunch of deer, rare-done, and the way the hungry road-agents let into it was a caution to animals of the *cervus* species to fight shy of Golden Bar.

After the meal, Deadwood Dick ordered his horse, and prepared to depart.

"Where now?" asked Calamity, rolling up a cigarette. "It's dangerous bein' abroad these times, you recollect."

"Yes, I know; but never fear for me.

It is yet to be truthfully said that Deadwood Dick was ever caught napping. As to where I'm going, it's to Deadwood. I shall return with a gospel-singer, if one can be found, and Miss Hawk, here, will then become your Princess, as I am your Prince!"

A thundering cheer went up from the highwaymen, for Leone was generally admired by them.

So saying, Deadwood Dick quitted the cavern and rode away into the starlit night.

Early on the following morning Deadwood Dick, accompanied by Donald, Anita, and Bessie, and the minister, arrived at the Golden Bar.

They were received with shouts of welcome by the road-agents. First, in order, came a splendid game breakfast; then the wedding ceremony of Richard and Leone, in which the Reverend Mr. Pennypacker acquitted himself very creditably. And thus were the hero of the road and the heroine of the Hills made man and wife, and it was the congratulatory wish of all present, that they might ever live happily together.

After the ceremony, Leone gave some explanations concerning herself and family history. Her mother had, while young, married a wealthy planter named Garry Hawk. When he had become the father of two children (Gerald and Leone) he was killed by an unknown assassin, leaving all his property to his children. Later, Mrs. Hawk had been prevailed upon by a tyrant father to wed Jasper Leslie, who treated her brutally, and finally attempted to drown her in the Missouri; but she escaped death there. Jasper Leslie's persecutions extended to the children, and, only a year before our story, Leone's brother, Gerald, had run away.

Her flight followed, to avoid the persecution of both her stepfather and his villainous associate, Curtis Sydnor. Why Mrs. Hawk did not return to her children, after escaping drowning, Leone was unable to tell.

And it was destined never to be known.

THE END

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